“Estamos en el Centro de una Necesidad Profunda”:
Latino Churches and Social Change

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Part 1: Intellectual and Theological Bases

Chapter 1: Setting the Stage

Religion is central in the lives of many immigrant Americans. As Levitt explains, “religion is one of the principal ways that migrants stay connected to places beyond where they settle” (Levitt 2007:107). At the same time, encountering new cultures in the immigration process reshapes immigrant religious identity and immigrants navigate between maintaining continuity and adapting or revising religious narratives (Ammerman 2003). Religious beliefs can also be a source of hope when immigrants are in desperate situations and these beliefs can shape how immigrants understand their role in society (Mooney 2009).

The institution of the church is of particular importance in immigrant religious expression. While US-born Americans are involved in a number of different civic organizations, churches are immigrants’ primary venues for civic engagement. Immigrants are more involved in faith communities than native-born Americans (Jasso 2000). Therefore, a holistic understanding of immigrant social, civic, and political integration into the US requires a thorough understanding of church membership and church life.

Given this need for better understanding of immigrants’ engagement with churches and church life, I conducted empirical qualitative research on a number of Latino churches1 in the Washington, DC metropolitan area. My research aimed at answering the following question: To what extent and in what ways do DC-area Latino faith communities promote domestic social change? The objective of this research was to both understand how Latinos conceptualize social

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1 Throughout this thesis, I use the word “church” to refer to the faith community or group of people and not simply to the institution or the physical building.
change and to assess their success in bringing about social change at the local and national levels.

1.1 Research Methodology and Thesis Organization

Many different groups of immigrants attend a variety of churches in the DC area. However, since Latinos are the largest group of immigrants in the US they have the potential for a broad and unique impact in the area of social change, which is why they are the focus of my study. This thesis is based on a three month intensive ethnographic study of six churches in the Washington DC metropolitan area that are either exclusively Latino or include a significant Latino population.2 For this research, I used grounded theory, which means that my final theoretical framework was informed by collected data and did not exist prior to the research. The research included in-depth participant observation and a series of semi-structured interviews. Beginning in September, I attended services at six faith communities and participated in other events such as small faith groups, rosary prayers, and activities that provided material assistance to the communities. From November through January I conducted 28 individual in-depth interviews and held two focus groups, one at a Catholic parish and another at a Protestant church. Many of the interviews were with church leaders though I also interviewed a number of congregants and a member of the Catholic hierarchy. In each church that had an Anglo-American population, I interviewed at least one leader from the English-speaking community in the parish. In the interviews, I asked the interviewees about their own faith journey and then focused on questions about church history, community and leadership. I then asked about the church’s role in society, both in the local community and in the broader national arena. Finally, I

2 This research received Institutional Review Board approval from Georgetown University. Approval is filed under the ID number of 2012-1094.
asked about the church’s relations to other congregations and the relation between ethnic or language congregations in the same parish church. I focused my early interviews more on the material assistance that churches offered and how Latino congregants were involved as providers of that assistance, but as I grew to understand the different perspectives on social change I modified my interview guide to include different mechanisms for social change. I analyzed my data by organizing notes into categories in a hierarchical framework. With NVivo software, a qualitative data analysis tool, I identified trends and principal themes from the interviews.

**Site Selection**

To select sites for research I used my own knowledge and connections from four years of work with immigrant communities in DC. I selected congregations that represented the diversity of Latino worship communities in the area. In addition, I aimed to establish some symmetry between the Catholic and Protestant communities. Some of the congregations I studied were located in historically Latino neighborhoods, but in order to consider the impact of different neighborhoods on social change activity, I did not confine my sample solely to Latino neighborhoods. (In-depth descriptions of neighborhood location can be found in Chapter 4.) Over the course of my research, a number of congregants and church leaders questioned my church selection and suggested churches that were more oriented toward social justice and that offered more services for immigrants. However, the intention of my site selection was not to highlight the most exceptional examples of civic engagement but rather show the range of activity of churches with different demographics and foci.
I settled on six churches with a significant Latino population: three Protestant and three Catholic. Located in a poor immigrant neighborhood in Virginia, *Amor y Paz*[^3] is a Latino worship community of about 75 members. This community is part of a larger Baptist church, which means that the Baptist church’s different language congregations share resources and come under the same oversight. Thus, in organizational structure *Amor y Paz* resembles Catholic parishes. Situated in a primarily Anglo neighborhood in Virginia, *Casa de Jesús* is a large Latino Assemblies of God church with about 300 members. Located in a mixed income neighborhood in Virginia, *Iglesia de Esperanza* is a small Pentecostal church with around 12 members and is representative of the house churches which are common among Latinos.

The three Catholic churches also represented a range of different structures and demographics. *Cristo Rey* occupies the center of a historically Salvadoran neighborhood in the District of Columbia. This large congregation has about 2,500 members. The church includes congregants from a variety of national origins and is 70% Spanish speaking, 20% English speaking, 5% Vietnamese and 5% Haitian. In a historically Latino neighborhood of DC that is now primarily Anglo, *Reina de Paz* has around 350 members. It was originally established as a mission church for Latino immigrants and still primarily serves that population. The church only recently added a small English mass. *St. Anthony’s* is in Northern Virginia in a poorer immigrant neighborhood surrounded by wealthier white neighborhoods. Latinos are the minority in this church (there are four English masses and just one Spanish mass) but there are a number of non-Latino immigrants in the English-speaking population.

*Researcher Experience and Positionality*

[^3]: To protect confidentiality of my respondents, all names of churches, programs, and individuals have been changed.
The great challenge of ethnography is at once to have access to rich information, while also analyzing the collected data from a distance. In order to access data, the researcher needs to connect to the studied community and develop excellent rapport with her consultants. I was fortunate to have good access to the congregations that I studied because of my connections to Latino communities in the DC area. Three years ago, I lived for a summer in an immigrant community in Northern Virginia called Chirilagua. For the three years since that summer I have been involved with Latino immigrant neighborhoods either through tutoring school-aged children, working with day laborers or simply being a neighbor. I relied on these community connections to gain access to interviewees and to inform my research in an informal sense with the communities’ perspectives and commentaries on church activity. Even when I did not initially know someone associated with a particular church, I knew the context of the neighborhood. I also understand the migration journey in part because of my work with deported migrants on the US/Mexico border and with Central Americans in transit in southern Mexico. This experience gave me legitimacy in the eyes of those whom I interviewed and opened doors to more frank conversation because I could establish a great rapport and gain people’s trust.

As much as my long experience with Latino immigrants was critical for my access to the communities and congregations I studied in this project, it also could have affected my results and diminished my ability to step back and consider the data more analytically. My desire to tell a positive narrative of immigrant activity in society likely affected how I perceived my data. Also, my preconceived notions based on what friends in these communities have said to me about Latino churches likely affected my framework of analysis. This distancing was not only a challenge in terms of understanding the immigrant experience but also from a religious
perspective. Because of my own faith expression, I am deeply sympathetic to both Protestant and Catholic communities.

However, to the extent possible I did try to maintain a neutral perspective. In order to keep track of my biases and attitudes I re-evaluated my discussion guides and interview data halfway through my research to see in what ways my own bias in asking questions was affecting the answers that interviewees gave and to modify my interview guides to follow up and explore the emerging themes. While every research project presents its own challenges, I felt prepared to conduct this study because of my experience conducting ethnographic interviews and facilitating focus group discussions while serving as a research assistant on a project about undocumented migrant children for the Institute for the Study of International Migration (ISIM) at Georgetown University. The research assistantship provided experience in conducting ethnographic fieldwork, coding and analyzing data, and drafting working papers based on the research. Therefore, this project is not based purely on my subjective connections to immigrant communities but also legitimate research experience, which gave me an ability to step back from my personal connections to the communities and issues and conduct a balanced analysis.

Thesis Outline

This thesis explores the following research question: To what extent and in what ways do DC-area Latino faith communities promote domestic social change? In this thesis I will explain how different understandings of and attitudes toward social change were expressed in official church doctrines and ensuing congregational activities as well as in individuals’ involvement within the studied churches. I will look at both how the different activities reinforce and support certain conceptions of social change and how certain conceptions of social change inform church and individual activities. Rather than incorporating a pre-existing framework, I base the idea of
social change in this paper on how members and the leadership of the Latino churches expressed the mechanisms of that change from their perspective.

The first section of this paper will discuss the four different mechanisms of social change that congregants and leaders articulated in interviews: prayer and conversion; family life; material assistance; and political involvement. This thesis focuses primarily on local social change because it is concerned with how immigrants are civically engaged in their communities and neighborhoods in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. I will examine church involvement in most of the mechanisms of social change in terms of their role in the local neighborhood or the city. Churches that were involved in their local neighborhoods did not necessarily just focus on local Latino populations but also on other groups in need. In the political mechanism of social change I do consider a broader national perspective, because voting activity has national implications. Also, since this research focused on the DC area, there were national implications to political activity within the city.

With these four mechanisms of change in mind, this paper uses the framework of bonding, bridging, and linking activities (Stepick 2009) to explain how churches implemented their vision of social change. In the first section I define the concept of social change, while in the second section I analyze bonding activity and how community formed within the churches. In the third section I explore bridging activity in the sense of how church members bridged to other people in the community who did not have access to economic or political resources. Although scholarly literature often defines bridging as crossing ethnic or social boundaries (Szreter 2002), in this paper it is simply crossing outside of the church community into the neighborhood or other social circles, such as serving poor Latinos who did not attend that church. In the fourth section I discuss linking activity or connections between members of a
particular faith community and other institutions, including other churches, native-born communities within the same church, and the government. I conclude with a brief discussion of the implications of this research for churches and directions for future research.

The perspective of the paper is congregation-centered but not entirely institutional. That is, it acknowledges the role of a congregation in shaping behavior (Kniss 2007). However, this thesis also recognizes differences among individuals in a faith community and considers the importance of individual perspectives on and involvement in social change.

1.2 Existing Research and Theoretical Frameworks

My study did not occur in isolation; it built on previous research. Many scholars have already analyzed the intersections of immigration, religion, and social change (e.g. Kniss 2007, Mooney 2009, Putnam 2000). Researchers have looked at these issues from a number of different perspectives. One area of scholarship looks at immigrants’ arrival in institutional churches in the US or the formation of immigrant-specific faith communities (e.g. Haddad 2003). A second focus of scholarship is a more instrumentalist view of the church, which means that scholars view faith as a means for a broader end and therefore examine the usefulness of that particular organization of faith to achieve another goal, such as integration or civic engagement. This area of study tends to focus on social capital and civic engagement and it includes both majority-culture and immigrant churches (e.g. Putnam 2000, Foley 2007, Stepick 2009). Finally, some scholars are beginning to look specifically at immigrant faith narratives in relation to their ideas about civic engagement and social change (Ammerman 2003, Mooney 2009).

Immigrants and Majority-Culture Churches
As a nation of immigrants, the US has welcomed diverse groups of immigrants. Starting with the Pilgrims who came in 1620, this country has been a place of refuge for many immigrants fleeing religious persecution. However, the arrival of new immigrants with different beliefs or faith expressions has often been a source of tension. When Irish and Italian Catholics immigrated around the turn of the 19th century, they often encountered discrimination and suspicion because of their religious beliefs. Although Protestants fled to the US to escape religious persecution, “Anti-Catholicism became the major common point characterizing an otherwise unmistakably diverse Protestantism” (Zoller 1999:68). Due to the tradition of immigration and immigrant incorporation in American society, one area of scholarship considers how the United States has received immigrants into religious life. The tension of reception may be more obvious for groups with significantly different religious practices or beliefs, such as immigrant Muslims or Hindus. However, both Latino Catholics and Protestants have encountered difficulty in their arrival on the religious scene in the United States because of their different faith expression. When the US Catholic Church first considered the incorporation of Latinos, the bishops emphasized the need for these immigrant populations to assimilate to US Catholicism – despite the fact that many Latinos who lived in the country were US citizens (in the case of Puerto Ricans) or had never physically moved into the country (in the case of the border change after the War of 1848) (Haddad 2003). Latino Protestants also struggled to integrate with native-born Protestant churches in spite of the fact that Protestantism spread through Latin America largely due to the work of American missionaries. As Levitt points out, “The descendants of those who converted bring their own version of Christianity back to the United States, asking to practice their faith alongside their denominational brothers and sisters”

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4 In this thesis, the term “faith expression” refers to different ways of practicing the same fundamental religious beliefs. For example, Latino Catholics share the same doctrinal basis as Anglo Catholics but express it differently.
Protestant churches vary in their willingness to accept this different version of Christianity.

In addition to the difficulty of initial reception into the US religious landscape, scholars and laypeople sometimes question Latinos and other immigrants for their tendency to gather with co-ethnics to worship. Scholars are divided on the extent to which churches are ethnic enclaves or links to broader society. On one hand, ethnic Latino churches provide a familiar space to immigrants in a new environment (Luna 2008). In that sense, these churches might see themselves as separate from broader society. On the other hand, Latino churches are distinct from other immigrant churches because they gather immigrants from many different nationalities and in that way create a space of broader engagement. Sixty-four percent of Latino faith communities include groups from two or more different Latin American countries (Stevens-Arroyo 2002). Contact in these contexts “gives rise to a new consciousness of US pan-Latinismo” (Díaz-Stevens 2003:75). Therefore, churches become enclaves but not enclaves specific to a particular ethnic or national group. Another question that arises in considering whether churches are ethnic enclaves is the issue of transnational involvement as contrasted with domestic engagement. However, expanding scholarship demonstrates that in fact transnational immigrants have to be involved domestically because “the ability of these transmigrants to wield political influence in both the U.S. and their home nation-states derives from their political incorporation in both settings” (Schiller 1995:57). Therefore, transnationalism and domestic engagement are not mutually exclusive activities. Rather, the two can reinforce each other. Besides, many Latinos have very little interest in transnational political lives because of the corruption in their home countries (Jones-Correa 1998).
Along with a realization of the false distinction between transnationalism and domestic engagement, there is also a growing acknowledgement of the role of faith communities in advocating for and supporting new immigrants. Churches establish a number of services for immigrants, including programs providing material assistance: food banks or clothing. However, some scholars are concerned that such provisions encourage an inward focus and reinforce ethnic identities of immigrant churches (Warner and Wittner 1998). At the same time, as faith communities grow in activism for social justice, advocacy on behalf of immigrants is a quickly increasing area of concern (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2006). In the Catholic Church, the hierarchy often takes responsibility for advocacy for immigrants on a local or national level (Haddad 2003; Mooney 2009). From initial suspicion, it seems that churches in the US are progressing to support Latino immigrants with an understanding of the balance they strike between transnational concerns and domestic engagement.

Churches, Civic Engagement, and Social Capital

Related to the literature on the religious reception and practice of new immigrants is another area of scholarship focused on how churches promote civic engagement, especially through social capital. Bourdieu, the author of the concept of social capital, defines it as the actual or potential resources available to people based on their social networks (Bourdieu 1986). As Stepick explains, Putnam takes the concept of social capital and expands it from an individual focus to the community (Stepick 2009). Putnam points out that the church is a primary source of social capital (Putnam 2000). Combined with the previously-stated observation that churches are the primary associations to which immigrants belong, scholars understandably have focused on the church as a source of social capital and an institution that could promote civic engagement.
Researchers have used ethnographic methods to study this phenomenon in a number of different communities, including Miami (Stepick 2009), Chicago (Kniss 2007) and DC (Foley 2007). All three are important works for my research and provide perspectives on different factors involved in civic engagement. Stepick adopts the idea of social capital and examines the extent to which civic social capital is promoted in immigrant churches (2009). He also looks at the relationship between church leadership and congregants and investigates how their interaction produces church practice and doctrine. Kniss classifies particular churches according to their theological beliefs and examines whether such beliefs are reflected in their civic engagement (2007). Foley also examines social capital in a number of church practices and brings up the concept of churches as training grounds for broader engagement (2007).

**Immigrant Faith**

Though a growing canon of work looks at immigrant churches institutionally and instrumentally, there is still very little research that considers immigrant faith lives.\(^5\) Outside of social science, there are a number of scholarly theological works that lay out the doctrine of various Latino churches in relation to ideas of social change. These works are especially significant in the Pentecostal churches because of the dearth of formal theology in that practice-oriented denomination. Petersen’s description of Pentecostal doctrine is the best articulation of Pentecostal understanding of social change, which he argues originates from individual empowerment (Petersen 1996).

These theological works are important because church teaching is expressed in observed religious practice and different levels of civic engagement (Chen 2002). Some scholars examine how these theological principles or beliefs operate in congregations and in individual lives.

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\(^5\) In my thesis, immigrant faith lives means how they construct and choose religious identities (Ammerman 2003) and how they express their identity through prayer, church participation, and other related practices.
Levitt (2007) explores how individual faith and religious alliances affect immigrants’ ideas of global citizenship. This perspective still tends toward the instrumental view of faith. Levitt uses her descriptions of individual faith specifically to make conclusions about civic engagement. Using the personal faith development angle, Ammerman (2003) explores how religion and immigration intersect in the creation of an identity narrative in an individual’s life. Mooney’s study of Haitian migrants expands on this idea of faith as integral to the identity narratives of immigrants. Ultimately, she goes further to look at how these narratives of resilience and faith shape immigrants’ conceptions of society and affect the church’s role in society (Mooney 2009). She also analyzes these faith narratives in the constitutive context of church communities and therefore investigates how these communities coalesce around ideas of social change and how representations of faith sustain them through struggles.

**Incorporating Scholarly Background**

In this thesis I draw on all three areas of scholarly literature to analyze how different understandings of and attitudes toward social change are expressed in institutional church activities as well as activities undertaken by individuals within their churches. The context of religious reception of Latino immigrants and church activity, discussed in the first area of scholarship, is an important factor of consideration especially to explain my findings related to leadership opportunities. I engage with the writings of the scholars studying civic engagement, particularly Stepick and Putnam, to conceptualize church activities as bonding, bridging, and linking. I do not, however, specifically discuss the idea of social capital. Bourdieu gave a very specific definition to social capital, which focuses on the resources available through certain networks. Not all mechanisms of social change relate to resource access so I use the framework without narrowing it to the concept of social networks. I also examine the question of social
change more broadly and, unlike Stepick (2009) and Foley (2007) I do not focus exclusively on civic engagement. My conceptualization has been inspired by Mooney’s (2009) exploration of how immigrant faith narratives inform their idea of civic engagement. I also consider theological perspectives from the different practices as I analyze different churches’ understandings of social change.
Chapter 2: Processes of Social Change: “A Different Vocabulary”

As one parishioner in the English-speaking community at Cristo Rey pointed out, “People in the Spanish speaking community care about social justice issues, they just use a different vocabulary.” In particular, he noted that Latino concern with social justice arises from a vocabulary of felt needs, such as a need for housing. In this need-based vocabulary of social justice, when church members proclaimed “estamos al centro de una necesidad profunda” (we are in the center of a profound need⁶) they meant a need that had both spiritual and material aspects. In this thesis, I do not use the mainstream framework of social justice; instead, I use the Latino church member understanding and vocabulary to define social needs and explore how social change comes about in the communities under study. In my interviews, I found that most congregants believed that social change was multi-faceted and included spiritual, moral, material, and structural aspects. Even though interviewees typically understood how the different mechanisms fit together into a coherent vision of social change, it is valuable to disaggregate the mechanisms of social change and explore their relative importance.

Latino study participants emphasized four mechanisms of change: spiritual renewal through prayer and conversion; ministry to strengthen families; material social programs; and political activism. They described spiritual renewal as un encuentro personal con Dios (a personal encounter with God), which happened either through prayer and deeper awareness of God for those who are already Christian or conversion to Christianity and an emotional attachment to the Christian God. Ministry to families focused on la familia sólida (the strong family), which meant strengthening the nuclear family by enhancing marriage, parenting, and youth life. Material assistance involved dando al necesitado (giving to the needy) goods such as

⁶ Unless otherwise indicated, all Spanish translation is mine.
food or rent money. Finally, political involvement was a way to tener una voz (have a voice) through contact with elected officials, community activism, and voting. Political involvement affected structural issues either in the local community or at the national level.

2.1 Un Encuentro Personal con Dios

Spiritual renewal is by its nature a primary focus of any faith community. In some interviews, pastors gave a lengthy explanation of the range of offerings to support spiritual life in the church even before I had begun asking questions. Many scholars who write on Pentecostalism emphasize that the Pentecostal theology of individual salvation and spiritual experience is the basis of their broader view of social change. Some argued that in terms of social action Pentecostals use a different language than Catholics but work for the same end of societal transformation (Espinosa et al 2005). The difference is that Pentecostals, among other denominations, focus on individual transformation to improve society. Kniss explains that Pentecostals see the individual as the locus of the moral project (Kniss 2007). While this classification may be accurate in a prima facie sense, in reality Pentecostals see society as the moral project but in order to work on societal change they focus on individual transformation. All denominations – not just Pentecostals – see spiritual life as important in their work for the good of society. Catholic Churches typically view society as their moral project (Kniss 2007), but my research shows that such a social concern was a part of and did not detract from their focus on spiritual life. Church leaders and members explained this emphasis first by establishing the importance of spiritual life for human well-being. Second, some churches focused on prayer as a tool to create tangible change. Similarly, a number of churches examined spiritual renewal
and how it created moral change, therefore helping physical and material well-being. In general, congregants viewed spiritual life as an indispensible part of any church program and activity.

**Spiritual Life and Well-Being of the Individual and Society**

Congregants in the six churches in this study thought spiritual life was important because they believed it was a fundamental human necessity. As members and leaders of many churches pointed out in their teachings and in interviews, human needs are spiritual and not just material. In fact, a number of individuals in describing their reasons for participating in a particular church focused primarily on the need to fill a spiritual void. Maria\(^7\) from *St Anthony’s* talked about the history of abuse in her childhood and how church helped meet her spiritual need and fulfill her. Protestant churchgoers who had converted from Catholicism especially emphasized the necessity of a personal relationship with God. Mariana from *Amor y Paz* said that before becoming a Protestant “I was thirsty for something else.” Now, her encounters with God at church filled a spiritual void. In my research, these churches did not confine social change to a goal of material well-being for parishioners or the broader community. As Wilmer, a member of the pastoral team at *Amor y Paz* said, “estamos en el centro de una necesidad profunda … pero no económica” (we are in the middle of profound need … but not economic).

Such teachings were far more common at the Protestant congregations in this study than at the Catholic churches. However, Catholic churches also emphasized this spiritual dimension. In particular, the Charismatic Renewal\(^8\) in the three Catholic parishes in the study focused on the gifts of the Spirit to renew faith. The pastor of *Cristo Rey* highlighted the importance of that movement to revive prayer lives and give people wholeness. Juan, a leader of the Charismatic

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\(^7\) To protect confidentiality, all names of individuals have been changed

\(^8\) The Charismatic Renewal is a recent movement in the Catholic Church that has great appeal among Latino laity and emphasizes the tangible working of the Holy Spirit. As Chesnut explains, if liberation theology was a preferential option for the poor, the Charismatic Renewal is “a preferential option for the spirit” (2008:55).
Renewal at *St Anthony’s*, explained that the idea of the movement was to “dar un encuentro personal a Dios” (give a personal encounter with God). There was a general cross-denominational belief that this personal encounter with God, or general spiritual well-being, was a fundamental part of a just society and not simply a means to an end of social justice. Such a statement seems apparent based on the primary function of churches. However, it is important to note the church’s beliefs because the goal of this paper is to define social change organically and depart from the focus of other scholars who instrumentalize churches in order to examine civic engagement (e.g. Foley 2007, Verba 1995).

Spiritual life was also important to churches as a starting point for broader action. In a number of sermons and interviews, pastors and church members mentioned that a strong spiritual life was the essential first step to moving out to change society. One pastor at *Amor y Paz* explained in his sermon that to be obedient to Christ’s command to serve, we should facilitate it “de adentro hacia afuera” (from within to without). Churches in this study understood spiritual change as a mechanism of social change because they believed that individual conversion was the fundamental basis of activity in society since societal problems were connected to individual sinful nature. On the radio show of *Casa de Jesús*, the pastor underlined his belief when he explained that the bad of man was in the heart and this sinfulness was the root of societal evils. While other churches expressed a similar sentiment, Pentecostals emphasized much more heavily that human evil was the reason for broader structural evil. From their perspective, spiritual transformation was necessary for societal transformation.

**Prayer for Social Change**

To some extent, all the churches in this study mentioned the centrality of spiritual life. However, because of their theological doctrine, Pentecostals were unique in their emphasis on
prayer as a primary mechanism for societal change. Essentially, Pentecostalism focuses on a personal experience of the Holy Spirit’s power and the church encourages participants to deal with their poverty through prayer (DeTemple 2005). That is, prayer saves people from poverty because God respond with material benefits or change. This view of prayer was an extension of the more general view of Christianity as a path of victory over adversity, which was a reason for Cambodian immigrant conversions in Ong’s Buddha is Hiding (Ong 2003). Pentecostals thought that this victory over adversity was based in spiritual life but manifested in material change.

The two Pentecostal churches in my research continually articulated this view in sermons, prayers, small groups, and interviews. A number of these material benefits obtained through prayer and spiritual life were personal. That is, church members spoke about receiving raises at work, gaining legal immigration status, recovering from sickness, or their debt being unexpectedly forgiven. As one pastor said, “Fui pobre toda mi vida … pero cuando conocí a Cristo, Dios me ha bendecido en la alimentación, los estudios y un matrimonio” (I was poor my whole life … but when I met Christ, God has blessed me with food, education and marriage). They attributed these personal benefits to God’s grace in responding to their prayer.

At the same time, in my study there was a community-wide aspect of the power and benefit of prayer. Churches spoke about how DC was protected from the impact of Hurricane Sandy by prayers, how child abuse would only be stopped through prayers, and how churches must pray for the government in order to promote change in legal systems. Not only was prayer an important part of individual empowerment but it was also a potent tool of social change. Every church, not just Pentecostals, prayed for needs in society and believed prayer impacted society. But the Pentecostal churches were the only ones in my research to clearly emphasize the direct correlation between prayer and material change on either a personal or community level.
Morality and Tangible Change

Few outside of the Pentecostal churches claimed a direct link between prayers and resulting tangible change, but a number of personal testimonies focused on the benefit to well-being of morality that comes from a strong spiritual life. That is, they did not say that God gave material gifts based on prayer but that having a strong spiritual life created moral change, which improved one’s circumstances, including material standing. Many of those interviewed had a specific testimony of spiritual transformation that led to a more upright moral life. Church members were not always willing to explain their previous moral state. They would simply say “I was doing bad things” or “I was with bad friends” and would focus on their personal transformation after coming to the church.

When they did explain in more detail, the most common moral issue, and often the only one mentioned, was alcoholism. Men from Baptist, Pentecostal, and Catholic churches all gave testimonies of God saving them from alcoholism. They either suffered from the addiction in their countries of origin, such as Guatemala, or upon arrival in the US. Imelda said that her husband drank a lot in Guatemala but when he came to Amor y Paz in the US he became a Christian and gave up drinking. She thought that God called them to come to the US just so that her husband could experience moral healing through spiritual transformation. Similarly, Luis was only peripherally involved at Cristo Rey when he suddenly had a personal encounter with God, left behind drinking and his old friends and started to participate more and more in the church. In each case, spiritual conversion and re-emphasis on the centrality of God led them to sobriety. According to their testimonies, Protestants experienced this spiritual conversion by coming to a church and Catholics experienced it by understanding mass as a personal encounter with God and not just cultural.
These testimonies were critical from the point of view of social change because of the effect alcoholism has on Latino communities. The pastor of Cristo Rey outlined his theory on why alcoholism is so prevalent. He said that “in our countries, governments gave cheap alcohol to pacify people” and keep them dumb through creating a dependency. He thought the church’s role was to liberate people from this dependency because dependency destroys community. Therefore, according to interviewees, moral healing in the form of freedom from alcohol seemed essential for stable Latino communities.

**Spiritual Element of All Church Programs**

Regardless of their specific justification for focusing on spirituality as a mechanism of social change, many church participants thought that a spiritual or evangelical element should be present in any church program. This view was far more common among Protestant churches, though by no means absent in Catholic parishes. The severity of this perspective also varied across churches. Some thought material service activities were good opportunities to engage in evangelization, such as a chance to pray with people or invite people to church. Others, particularly at Catholic parishes, cautioned against elevating the church’s social role above its religious one. (Of course, based on the preceding discussion of the importance of spiritual life in social change I would argue that their understanding of the church’s religious role is not clearly distinguishable from its social role). Many of those interviewed in Pentecostal churches believed evangelism should be the only end to these material service programs because spiritual life was all that is ultimately important. When asked about hypothetical service programs, they were not opposed to such assistance, but said that the program had to be targeted with a clear purpose of evangelization. As one participant said, our primary call is to “ganar almas” (gain souls). Thus, any kind of material service had to involve a spiritual element in order to promote social change.
The focus on spirituality in this study was not just because churches prioritized spiritual life. Many of those interviewed expressed the view that their church focuses on spiritual care because it is the issue that they can best address. In the small Pentecostal house church, the pastor said that he gave more spiritual and psychological help because he did not have the finances to meet other needs. Sometimes churches focused on spiritual life simply because the problems they faced were overwhelming. For example, in a post-mass rosary prayer at St. Anthony’s, one woman prayed for the reform of gang members in Central America. In some instances in my research, church’s involvement in spiritual life was not a negligence of other mechanisms of social change but rather recognition of their own limited power in the face of grander problems. At those times, prayer seemed to be the only viable mechanism of change.

2.2 La Familia Sólida

While spiritual life was an obvious focus in all churches, family life was also an important concern in Latino churches in this study. Latino communities are already known for their family values. Hayes-Bautista, when describing the strengths of the Latino community, points out that “Latinos are more likely to form family units than any other racial/ethnic group in California when family is defined as consisting of the conventional couple with children” (Hayes-Bautista 1992:17). A pressing concern for churches, according to the scholars, is ministry to Latino youth. A recent study of Latino churches suggests that the most important task for both Catholic and Latino churches is to improve conditions of life for second-generation youth (Crane 2003). The church can shape how second-generation youth acculturate and make meaning of the world around them (Riebe-Estrella 2004). Scholars often focus on the assimilation of youth with the implication that if the church addresses the needs of Latino youth then it will change society.
and address youth-related social problems. Church members in interviews, however, talked more about strong marriages than the needs of youth, except when prompted. Their attitude was that a strong family unit would naturally address the concerns of youth.

Church leaders and participants in this study believed that if marriages were strong, the youth would accordingly be faithful. The Catholic Church teaches a similar vision of marriage and family life as a locus of social change. The Catechism says “believing families are of primary importance as centers of living, radiant faith” (Catechism, 2nd ed., 1656). Catholics in this research thought that families, defined as a married man and woman with children, represent the domestic church whose purpose is to enrich the faith of the children. Although Protestant churches did not have as specific and centralized church doctrine, they defined family in the same way and family life was central to their pastoral concern as well. In terms of social change, the church members and leaders interviewed for this study thought that family issues were a source of many social problems but at the same time families were a potential locus of social improvement and that churches should be concerned with integration of children into US society.

**Marriage**

Church leaders proclaimed in sermons and interviews that bad marriages, divorced parents and couples living together before religious marriage\(^9\) were sources of many social problems. The priest of *St. Anthony’s* said that most of the needs in that particular community arose when a “woman gets together idiotically with some man and he dumps her and leaves her with two kids.” The priest argued that the couples’ hastiness, their failure to marry and the man’s actions in leaving the woman all lead to that woman’s poverty. The pastor of *Casa de Jesús* also thought that a major source of Latino poverty was a failure to marry and a tendency to divorce.

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\(^9\) Common law marriage or *unión libre* is common in Latino communities, but when church leaders spoke about the importance of marriage they seemed to refer to the necessity for official religious marriages.
In a sermon, he pointed to statistics saying that 75% of Anglo couples are married and just 54% of Latinos. For him, this data suggested that Anglos value the family more than Latinos. His conclusion was that Anglos are richer because they marry more and value family more. Interestingly, at a later service on that same day the pastor of Iglesia de Esperanza cited the same statistics and concluded that Latinos were impoverished because of their family problems. In each instance, church leaders thought that social problems including poverty emerged from a lack of strong nuclear family units.

Many church leaders had a negative view of family fragmentation. They believed that high divorce rates and cohabitation without religious marriage led to problems in society, but they also thought that families were a potential locus of social improvement. That is, if family life and particularly marriage were improved and strengthened, then the church and society would flourish. Casa de Jesús articulated its mission as: “Gain neighborhoods and families and consolidate and restore them so they can prosper.” Similarly, Iglesia de Esperanza said that the Hispanic church wanted the best for their people and since the number one problem among Latinos is marriage, the church wanted to help. Catholic churches had a similar articulation of the relation between family and society. Interviews substantiated the Church’s teaching on the family as a domestic church. The priest at Cristo Rey pointed out that “the church is built off of small churches, that is, communities and families.” Family life extended even beyond strengthening the church. In one interview, a parishioner at Reina de Paz said “si la familia es solida hace una mejora sociedad” (if the family is solid, it makes society better). Both Catholic and Protestant churches in this study emphasized that divorce is forbidden by God. In some interviews, Catholic parishioners speculated that Latinos left the Catholic Church for Protestant churches because of the severity of the Catholic teaching on the sanctity of marriage. However,
evidence from Protestant churches did not substantiate this claim. In fact, all churches in this study taught against divorce and encouraged stable marriages.

**Youth**

In spite of a scholarly concern for assimilation of youth, congregants in my research focused more on married life and less on the needs of youth. In interviews, church leaders and congregants initiated conversations about the importance of marriage without prompting. In fact, they often brought up marriage issues when I thought that the questions I asked focused on other concerns. With a few exceptions, church leaders and participants talked less commonly about youth. Perhaps that is why such scholarly effort is devoted to encourage churches to focus on second-generation youth (See Riebe-Estrella 2004, Deck 2004, Hoge 2001). However, when church leaders and participants did discuss issues of youth in terms of family life they often linked the spiritual well-being of youth to societal well-being.

Members of many churches said that the spiritual well-being of youth comes from the health of marriage and family life. In one sermon at *Casa de Jesús* the pastor said that parents are responsible for their children’s behavior, which meant that irresponsible parents lead to irresponsible children. He warned that while the church would pray for youth and visit them in the hospital or in jail, parents should not wait until the youth is in jail before worrying about their faith. If parents were more involved in the faith life of their children, then youth would not be involved in so much troublesome behavior. Protestant interviewees in particular suggested that parents should pray with their children because instilling faith life would keep them from trouble, such as drugs or gang activity. They also said that divorces and fractured families contributed to youth delinquency. For them, strong family life was thus essential for the youth’s well-being and prevention of societal ills.
A youth leader at a *Cristo Rey* pointed specifically to the idea of youth ministry at church as reducing gang violence. He said that churches could be an opposite force to gangs by creating a sense of community that youth are lacking. In cases of divorced or absent parents and unstable family situations, he thought that a strong church community could substitute as a healthy environment for kids. However, for him the gang violence in the neighborhood was evidence that the church was not doing its part in that regard. Therefore, the church’s specific youth ministry was an important place for social change especially when family life has failed.

Interviewees discussed strong marriage much more than issues of youth. However, churches agreed that both areas of family life were critical to the well-being of society. If the family was a smaller unit at the foundation of the church, it was similarly a small community at the foundation of society. Therefore, according to the teaching at these churches, ministry to families was a critical unit of social change.

**2.3 Dando al Necesitado**

The fact that churches concerned themselves with issues of spirituality and family life in no way diminished their belief in the importance of other methods of social change that were common among secular organizations, particularly those of material assistance and political involvement. All churches studied in this project endorsed – at least in theory – the idea that providing material assistance was a part of Christian life and an aspect of social change. They supported this idea even if they did not think that material assistance was an end in itself or if their church did not have its own assistance programs. While all interviewees thought engagement in assistance programs was important, they differed on whether the locus of service
work should be locally in the US or in the immigrants’ countries. They also disagreed on how churches should relate to governmental and other organizations that also serve the community.

**Justification for Involvement**

There were many commonalities in how church leaders and members justified providing material assistance, however, my findings indicate that theological and personal perspectives produced different ways of phrasing this view. I have identified two primary perspectives from which the interviewees approached this issue. One group of interviewees examined the material needs of congregation members and said that those needs compelled them to advocate for and participate in providing material assistance. The other perspective saw such service as a faith mandate stemming from the Bible and Church teachings. Many individuals incorporated both views in their justification, but disaggregating those views helps to understand the implications of these perspectives for church activity.

People who expressed the needs-based perspective on material assistance as related to domestic social change often thought that churches should holistically respond to a number of needs. As the priest of Cristo Rey said, the Church needs to be “involved in every situation of human beings.” That meant responding to both spiritual and material needs and being a constant presence in the community. Members of Catholic parishes talked about holistic ministry more often than Protestant congregants. Catholic parishioners often pointed to both the spiritual and material needs of people and said that even if they have relied on the church mostly for spiritual support others may come for economic support. As Maria at St. Anthony’s said, “I was called spiritually but I may need material support at some point.” Amor y Paz was the most consistent of all Protestant churches in emphasizing the importance of meeting material needs in the community. As one participant said, “Hay mucha necesidad y Dios escoge el camino de llegar a
ellos” (There is a lot of need and God chooses the path to meet people). But in general, Catholics were more likely to justify service programs by pointing to the material needs of the community, perhaps because Protestants focused on first meeting the spiritual needs of the neighborhood. At the same time, church members did not always justify service in terms of good work done for others. Many interviewees identified with those being served as their co-ethnics. The priest at Reina de Paz explained that Latinos needed to serve each other “to advance our people.” Catholic and Protestant churches in this study shared this desire to help Latinos as a people and address their needs to strengthen the Latino community as a whole. In this articulation, they amplified the reasons for material service since they believed it led to social change.

Many Protestant churchgoers and Catholics who participated in the Charismatic Renewal also justified material social programs because they could be tools of evangelization, which reinforced the spiritual mechanism of change. Therefore, rather than justifying material assistance programs based on how they met material needs, they justified service based on its potential to meet spiritual needs by bringing people to the church. Not all such programs were obviously evangelistic, but church participants often saw them as a chance to build relationships with people in the community who would not otherwise come to church. As one leader of the Food Bank at Amor y Paz said, “Food is a vehicle to show God’s love.” Another church member pointed out: “La comunidad con necesidad llega porque la iglesia les da algo” (The needy members of community arrive because the church gives them something).

Despite this difference in the justification of service based on needs, people across all churches in the study believed that material assistance to others was an imperative of the Christian life. They most often justified material assistance because it was an expression of love. People across the churches thought that material service was a way of loving their neighbor,
which is one of God’s two fundamental commands. A large contingent also pointed to the example of Jesus and his ministry as he addressed many different needs. One member of Cristo Rey described Jesus’ ministry in three categories: prayer, healing, and giving food. He said that we must imitate all three components as we try to follow Jesus. People in many interviews gave examples of Christ’s ministry, including healing the blind, feeding the hungry, and eating with sinners. The fact that Jesus did this work was enough to compel Christians to do the same.

In their justifications, Protestant churches were careful to distinguish between faith and works in the order of salvation when they discussed the call to service. They often said “las buenas obras no nos salvan” (good works do not save us) but at the same time said they were called to serve because service is pleasing to God, is an expression of God’s love, and the Bible commands the faithful to love. A few members of Amor y Paz even quoted James 2:20 that “faith without works is dead.” The Protestants did not want to confuse the command to serve with their belief that salvation is by God’s grace alone. This hesitation did not, however, reduce the strength of their emphasis on justifying and engaging in material assistance programs.

**Locus of Work: Latin America or Locally in the United States**

While all churches, when asked about service, endorsed the idea of material assistance as an imperative for Christians, not all had robust service programs. Only two engaged regularly and extensively in service through church programs, while two others had just occasional service events and the final two only engaged in service on an ad hoc basis. There were a number of variables that determined this engagement, which will be discussed throughout the paper, particularly in the section on bonding activity that focuses on programs meeting material needs. In the present section, I will consider perceptions of the appropriate locus of service engagement as an important variable that shaped church programs.
Since this research focused on Latino churches engaging in social change at the local level in the metro DC area, it is important to ask whether Latino churches perceived their role as in the US or in countries of origin. The literature suggests that immigrant churches are not engaged in civic life in the United States because they focus on their home country (Stepick 2009). Common wisdom, and some Catholics in this study, thought that Pentecostal churches did not value material assistance. Pentecostal writers and scholars have recently tried to combat that notion by pointing to the myriad of programs offered by Pentecostal churches including education for children in the slums and childcare programs. According to Petersen, material assistance programs are not uncommon among these churches, but mostly focus on Latin America and not on the US (Petersen 1996).

My research findings corroborate the hypothesis that immigrants value material assistance work in the immigrants’ countries of origin more than in the US. A few interviewees described the service work done by their home-country church communities, including children’s programs, medical assistance, and food and clothing distribution. The level of services they described was striking given that three of those interviewed who described such services attended Casa de Jesús, which offered no opportunities to engage in local material assistance. Beyond those who spoke of material assistance at their former churches in Latin America, many also gave examples of ways that their local DC church was involved in supporting service back in their countries of origin, particularly through financial donations. One of the women at St. Anthony’s described her involvement in fundraising for churches back home as a desire to “dar de los Estados Unidos al Salvador” (give of the United States to El Salvador).

There were two primary reasons why churches of the same denomination were more involved in service in Latin America than in the US and why many Latinos interviewed
supported transnational causes. The first reason was a perception that the need was greater in Central America. Imelda at *Amor y Paz* said that everyone was economically blessed in the United States. She described at length poverty in Guatemala: houses with no walls and people suffering from hunger. Here, she thought, people did not have a real need. In the US the poor might even work and receive government support while in Guatemala the poor were those who did not have work and were not supported by the government. Because of this stark difference in need, she did not see any reason to offer help in the US. This view is understandable given that some of the programs supported by DC-area churches included putting in potable water, building a cement road, and supporting a children’s hospital – all services that were already available in the US. This involvement is also reasonable because of the previously mentioned needs-based justification for engaging in such service. In this study, if churches thought that service was responding to needs and the need was more international than domestic, it was sensible to focus their efforts elsewhere for this area of social change.

The second reason, which scholarly literature explains, is less needs-focused and stems from the idea that immigrants’ countries of origin are their homeland and therefore should be the center of their attention. Many immigrants came here because they wanted to support relatives and their community back home. This reason for material service is more closely linked to the literature on transnationalism (e.g. Levitt 2001, Luna 2008). Interviewees did not explicitly mention this reason but implied it by the immigrants’ identification with their home country and the way they talked about support of their community in the sense that it was their true home.

However, the transnational focus was not unanimous or homogenous. Maria at *St. Anthony’s* came to the US when she was just a few months old and she said that when she was younger she wanted to join the Peace Corps, but now saw the local need in Northern Virginia
and wanted to serve here. Many of the churches were involved transnationally, but those who expressed an understanding of the transnational need were also involved in local material assistance. My research indicates that supporting communities in Latin America did not preclude the study participants and their churches from engagement with local assistance programs. However, the direction of energy and attention did affect the provision of services in the US.

*Locus of Work: Church, Individual, Government, Other Organizations*

The question of material assistance was not limited to the issue of where it should be provided: in the United States or in countries of origin. Another important issue that transpired in interviews related to the degree of formality of such programs and whether churches were best-suited to perform this work. Scholars agree that immigrant congregations tend to provide more informal services than formal programs (Foley 2007, Kniss 2007). Some churches in this study demonstrated this informality in faith-sharing or prayer groups that collected money and used it to support other members of the congregation. Correlated with this informality was the perception among some church members that the impetus for action rested on the individual. Many interviewees explained that they engaged in service outside the church. Younger church members expressed career goals in relation to service. For example, one young woman at *Casa de Jesús* spoke about her desire to become an immigration lawyer to support her community. Older members talked about their participation in material assistance through other organizations or simply by being open to help needy people they came across, such as a homeless man in the street. One man at *Cristo Rey* explained that he volunteered weekly at a house for mentally disabled individuals. In these cases, the compulsion to service meant that they should take individual action outside of the church and not rely on church programming.
In terms of more formal programs, there was a mixture of views on the relative importance of church activity in the material assistance mechanism of social change as compared to the role of the government and other service providers. This determination cuts in two directions. Kniss suggests that Pentecostal churches in general are more concerned with staying religiously pure, so they are dissuaded from partnerships with other churches or agencies (Kniss 2007). Therefore, Pentecostals would likely not see government and social service agencies as adequate replacements for Christian service because they do not incorporate an element of evangelization. This sentiment emerged in the Protestant churches studied (Pentecostal and Baptist) more by omission than by admission. When members of Protestant churches discussed meeting community needs, they rarely pointed to how the government or other organizations were serving. Ironically, among the three Protestant churches in this study, only the Baptists had specific service programs, even though research shows that more robust church-centered social service programs help support the evangelical programs of that same church (Mooney 2009).

At the same time, within St. Anthony’s, many of those interviewed gave examples of a number of government and community services and said that the community was already well-served and did not need more support. Interviewees specifically referenced the local non-profit health clinic and the governmental rent assistance program. In this case, the church was less engaged in service because they thought that role was already filled. However, a member of the Catholic Church hierarchy objected to this view and thought that the parish was shirking its responsibility to serve the Latino community. Perhaps the church excused their own role by pointing to services already provided by others. Of course, all Catholic parishes in this study did not share this perspective. Members of the Cristo Rey parish in particular thought that in providing space for a homeless day shelter they were assuming a role that the archdiocese or the
government could better execute, but they continued that service because as one member said “si no lo hacen, quien lo va a hacer?” (If they don’t do it, who is going to do it?).

2.4 Tener una Voz

While there was agreement among study participants on the role of material assistance as a way that churches should be involved in social change, there was considerable disagreement about the role of politics. Levitt summarizes these views when she mentions that most immigrants distrust politics while at the same time think that religion had a role in making a good society (Levitt 2008). This tension was clear in many interviews. Church members often expressed opposition to political involvement but in the next sentence described the political issues, such as abortion and immigration, in which they thought the church should be involved.

Church participants and leaders were primarily opposed to political involvement because they thought it detracted from the focus on faith. As Anabel at St. Anthony’s said, “la iglesia debe mantenerse por lo que está” (the church should keep itself for what it is). In discussing politics, interviewees often said that we are obedient ultimately to God and no political party or politician can come close to his will. Of course, non-immigrant church members could just as easily express these particular views on the role of church.

Latino churches in my research were sometimes more extreme in their views since Latinos also mistrusted politics because of widespread corruption in their home countries. This view is especially common among Pentecostals (Petersen 1996) though certainly not limited to this denomination. Many church members and leaders explained that experiences with corrupt officials in home countries deter immigrants from involvement in the United States. Silvia from Amor y Paz said that she was adamantly opposed to politics because she thought the Catholic
Church became too involved in the Salvadoran civil war to the point of brainwashing people to support the guerillas. She opposed the Church’s action even though she was sympathetic to the guerilla cause. She was the only person who consistently expressed opposition to politics and did not identify any situations in which the church should be politically concerned.

Because of the mistrust, even those with strong political views insisted that they were just preaching the gospel and not getting involved in politics. This tendency parallels the observation that immigrant organizations label themselves as non-political because they simply narrowed the definition of politics (Jones-Correa 1998). In spite of their resistance to the vocabulary of politics, churches in this study were politically concerned and did think that politics was a way of social change, particularly in specific areas such as abortion or immigration reform. Church members and leaders tended to endorse the church’s role in education on or support of specific political issues and in generally promoting voting or education.

Specific Political Issues

Church members and leaders identified two areas of concern in terms of how politics can promote social change. First, they expressed widespread support for church involvement in social issues such as opposing homosexual marriage and abortion. This area of concern was similar to the political focus of many majority culture churches. Second, Latino churches showed special interest in issues of immigration and poverty. They emphasized that category of interest because of how those issues directly affect the Latino community.

A member of the Catholic Church hierarchy in Virginia said that Latinos were more interested in immigration issues than marriage issues or pro-life stances. His opinions did not seem to correspond with the opinions of the immigrants in this study. Latino immigrants brought up marriage and pro-life issues in interviews as frequently as immigration and poverty problems
and sometimes even more frequently. Anytime they listed political issues they would inevitably include their stance against abortion. But at the same time, any push to activism on these issues that I observed seemed to come from church leadership and did not originate organically from the congregation. The priest at Cristo Rey lauded the courage of the bishops in responding to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) mandate to require coverage of contraception costs. He compared their stand to Oscar Romero’s stand for justice in the Salvadoran civil war and said that the church in the US should continue to be courageous on these issues. Even though he expressed this view strongly, few church members echoed his concern with the HHS mandate.

I had a unique perspective on political involvement because I conducted some of my research and a number of church visits before the November election. Casa de Jesús, which had some membership who lived in Maryland, advocated particularly strongly against the legalization of gay marriage. While many church participants shared this perspective against homosexual marriage, it seemed that the church leadership made the actual push for advocacy.

Understandably, Latinos in this study were also concerned with immigration reform and better support for the poor. Each of the congregations had at least some number of undocumented immigrants and therefore they equated promoting immigration reform with promoting a better society for their own members. In a number of interviews, congregants pointed to a particular instance of deportation or threatened deportation of a church member as the basis for advocacy. Elections were also an opportunity to advocate for immigration reform. The pastor of Casa de Jesús not only spoke against legalization of homosexual marriage in Maryland but also advocated for the Maryland DREAM Act. The leader of social outreach at Amor y Paz said that evangelicals should be more involved in immigration advocacy. She pointed out that the Catholic Church was an early voice in support of immigrants and said that
Unfortunately evangelicals have not yet assumed that role. While interviewees painted immigration as a national political concern, they often, though not exclusively, thought poverty issues were more local concerns. In part because of the aforementioned approach to social justice from a needs-based perspective, many church members were just interested in advocacy on behalf of the poor as a concern to mobilize local governmental resources in support of the community. Perhaps this local mobilization came in part from the sense that change is more likely to occur on a smaller scale, though more research is needed to explore the effect of perceived feasibility of change on involvement in political action.

**General Involvement**

Beyond concern for specific issues, several church members and leaders thought general political involvement such as voting was a positive way to promote social change. In particular, many expressed the view that “la iglesia tiene que empezar a tener voz” (the church needs to begin to have a voice). They said that this involvement was critical to protect religious freedom and promote the church’s perspective on different issues. Of course, Latino churches in this study were concerned not just with the church having a voice but also with the Latino community having a voice. One Latino member of the Catholic Church hierarchy described Latinos as “lions asleep” who had now woken up to involvement and were therefore better able to protect the interests of their community. Pentecostals accepted the idea of being involved in politics because, as one expressed, “Si la política es parte de la vida en la tierra tienen que hacer las cosas mejores” (if politics is part of life on the Earth, they have to make things better). Pentecostals preferred other methods of social change, particularly spiritual renewal, but in general in interviews they said that politics were important to social change in a temporal sense.
2.5 Holistic Social Change

The mechanisms of social change found in this study fit well into the preceding four categories of spiritual renewal, ministry to families, material assistance, and political action. None of the study participants emphasized a particular area to the exclusion of any other one. Rather, these churches combined these mechanisms in different ways. Most interviewees often touched on at least three if not all four of these areas. Pentecostals are most often accused of emphasizing the exclusive importance of spiritual life to change society. However, this trend seems to be changing recently with some Pentecostals expressing more concern for the whole person (Ríos 2005). Nevertheless, a leader at Amor y Paz pointed to the problem of evangelicals who focused only on the spiritual part whereas, in her estimation, Catholics focused only on deeds. She explained that both faith and serving God in more tangible works were important for obeying the Bible’s commands and for social change. Silvia from Casa de Jesús also expressed the importance of the “evangelio completo” (complete gospel) which included both material and spiritual needs. She did, however, think that her church was not embracing this complete idea as much as it should. Each element was critical to forming a conception of social change, according to the study participants. Churches had particular activities to bring about social change in part because of different areas of emphasis in the mechanisms of change and in part due to structural factors such as leadership and resources. The remaining sections of this paper will explore how this theory was expressed in practice, especially through the ways the churches operated
Part 2: Church Activity

Chapter 3: “La Iglesia es Madre” (Bonding Activity)

When asked to generalize their view of the church, many Latinos explained “la iglesia es madre” (church is mother) or “somos una familia” (we are a family) or “son mis hermanos y hermanas” (they are my brothers and sisters). As these descriptions of the church as a family illustrate, immigrant churches are particularly known for their bonding activity, which draws members of the congregation together to form relationships. The churches reinforce this bonding activity because “the ethnic church as a transnational institution can provide a familiar space for immigrants in a different environment” (Luna 2008:59). This familiarity promotes a tight community feeling and at the same time the formation of a close church community creates familiar space. Some scholars think that immigrant churches’ overemphasis on bonding limits such churches’ involvement in broader society and the integration of church members into the host country (e.g. Warner and Wittner 1998; Min 1992; Bankston and Zhou 1996).

My research findings suggest that bonding activities in churches were a way of working toward social change. Bonding activities were an indirect way for churches to promote bridging and linking activities. The first section of this chapter explores the opportunities to build community within each studied church. As already indicated, bonding activities directly or indirectly promoted social change through the four main mechanisms – spiritual, familial, material, and political--defined in the preceding chapter. The second section addresses the extent to which this community building contributed to leadership development in the different areas of social change action. The third section explains how the emphasis on community reinforced and
contributed to the spiritual and familial mechanisms of social change. The final section describes how bonding activity encouraged involvement in a range of church programs, which at times enhanced the material and political mechanisms of social change.

### 3.1 Opportunities to Build Community

Although Latino churches typically value community, both my research and existing scholarly literature show that every church does not equally emphasize close relationships between congregants. In his survey of DC-area churches, Foley found a particular difference between Catholic and Protestant churches. He looked at smaller groups within the church as a place of fellowship and found that all Catholic parishes and 91% of Protestant churches have these cell groups. However, only 26% of adult members in the Catholic parishes participate, which is much less than the 47% participation rate in the Protestant churches (Foley 2007). Because of the difference in opportunities for fellowship, Foley defines Catholic churches as houses of worship where members gather for the service and then disperse without much fellowship. As he says, “nor does the stranger feel any compulsion to stay afterward for the social hour, rarely found in Catholic parishes in any case (and sparsely attended when found)” (Foley 2007:95). Foley’s research demonstrates the difference in the intensity of fellowship activity among Catholics and Protestants. However, my research indicates that his conclusions are somewhat exaggerated.

Indeed, Protestant churches in my study did emphasize community more intentionally than Catholics. Many Protestant church members who were Catholic when they came to the US said that they went to mass initially and missed the community feel. As one woman said, “la gente salía y se acaba la cosa” (the people left the church after mass and it was all over).
Although Protestants perceived Catholic parishes as less community-oriented, my findings indicate that some did have a strong emphasis on community, though not every member of the church was as intentionally included as in the Protestant churches. Typically, in both Catholic and Protestant churches the opportunities to build community came from after-service coffee hours and small groups of prayer or faith sharing or other similar activity. However, a difference between Catholic and Protestant congregations is that the Protestant congregations tend to be smaller. A survey of Latino congregations indicates that parishes tend to offer the same number of church activities and organizations regardless of size, so there are relatively more opportunities for involvement in smaller churches (Stevens-Arroyo 2002).

Five of the six churches in this study had some form of an after-service coffee or food hour where church members or visitors would gather to talk. *St. Anthony’s* was the only church that did not provide an opportunity for community gathering, seemingly because of lack of space. While other churches had a major gathering space connected to the church that could host these events, *St. Anthony’s* did not. Church members noticed this lack of a social hour. One parishioner mentioned that a major difference between her church in El Salvador and *St. Anthony’s* was that in El Salvador church members knew each other whereas here they simply come to mass and then leave without gathering and talking afterward. This critique supports both the Latino Protestants’ sentiment about lack of community in services and Foley’s statement about the lack of social hour in Catholic parishes. However, two of the three Catholic parishes promoted well-attended social hours. *Cristo Rey* had gatherings in their basement with Central American food and tables for members to sit and talk. An Anglo who regularly attended English-speaking mass at *Cristo Rey* and sometimes went to Spanish-speaking mass said: “the idea of going to mass for Spanish speakers is different.” He explained that the Spanish speakers spent
more time together after mass and, as he said, “are always eating food.” Similarly, at Reina de Paz the cafeteria was an important place to gather. Since Reina de Paz included Latinos from many different countries, each week women from a different national group brought food to sell. An older woman in the church said that these meals after mass were the best opportunity to meet people and that she was very intentional about reaching out to those in the cafeteria. She explained that in the cafeteria “Saludo a la gente que se ven tristes y les pregunto si tienen algunas necesidades” (I greet the people who seem sad and ask them if they need anything).

Each of the Protestant churches had an after service social hour and attendance was more heavily encouraged than in the Catholic parishes. Casa de Jesús did not have a coffee hour for every member, but they did have one for visitors. When I visited the church, I was specifically invited to this coffee hour by a number of enthusiastic church members. I attended along with two other visitors and the pastor’s parents and a few other church leaders welcomed us. As we shared coffee and galletas, one of the church members who was apparently responsible for encouraging the fourth visitor of the day came back disappointed that the person was uninterested in the coffee hour in spite of the fact that she had tried many times to encourage that visitor to come. The goal of the coffee hour was to ensure that the church community immediately welcomed all visitors and gave them a chance for meaningful contact with the church leadership. Many long-term church members said in interviews that this outreach to newcomers was a way to immediately involve new members in the church. However, one visitor at the coffee hour I attended was a parishioner at a different church and was merely visiting her friend for a day, so while she appreciated the coffee and cookies she did not seem interested in communicating with the church leaders. Amor y Paz had a well-attended coffee hour that lasted for two hours at times. Most church members attended and it was easy to make connections in
the congregation and even recruit study participants during the coffee hour. *Iglesia de Esperanza* also put out coffee and *galletas* after service. Of course, bonding activity was easier to promote in that church because there were only 10 to 15 members, many of whom already knew each other before joining the church. The church even held one service at a birthday party of a boy whose mom attends the church.

Social hour was not, however, the only or even the primary locus of bonding activity in these churches. As Foley points out, smaller groups are an important point of fellowship. Protestant churches in this study actively promoted these smaller groups. Catholic parishes had them, but participation in these groups was not as high as in the Protestant churches. *Casa de Jesús* and *Amor y Paz* heavily encouraged participation in small groups because they were places of spiritual support. There were between 6 and 15 members in each group that represented a diverse cross-section of the church. From a research perspective, these groups were excellent places to establish contacts and even hold focus group discussions. From a church member perspective, the smaller communities were places to share each others’ needs and support each other in prayer. At *Amor y Paz*, small groups used to take up collections to financially support people in the group, though that practice ended because of bureaucratic issues.

While I perceived more pressure toward involvement in small groups in the Protestant churches, Catholic parishes also offered opportunities for bonding. As a parishioner at *Cristo Rey* mentioned, someone who just came to mass might think that mass was the only thing that the church offered and that there was no other way to get involved. However, once a parishioner got involved in other activities he discovered the church community. There was not the same pressure to be involved as in Protestant churches, since Catholic communities are primarily what Foley calls “houses of worship” where one can arrive, worship, and leave (Foley 2007).
However, if a church member wanted to be involved, there were opportunities for bonding activity. Pressure to stay involved increased as well once he participated in more activities. I will return to the issue of pressure to participate in the final section of this chapter.

Catholic churches also had small groups but they seemed to be more segmented and did not draw from across the congregation. That is, there were specific groups for the elderly members or for married couples or for youth. These groups were often segments of the broader Charismatic Renewal, which was a prayer group specifically focused on the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the Spirit’s tangible presence in Christians’ lives. One leader in the church hierarchy called the Charismatic Renewal “el motor de la iglesia” (the motor of the church) because of the tight community that it created and the ways those communities moved into action. Each of the three Catholic parishes had a strong Charismatic Renewal movement, which seemed to be a primary locus of bonding activity. The Charismatic group at St. Anthony’s was the main activity outside of mass that brought church members together. At Reina de Paz, much of the social activity also centered on the Charismatic Renewal. Crísto Rey had a Charismatic Renewal movement but because of the large size of the church it also had many other programs and ways to become involved in bonding activities, including young adult groups and service opportunities, especially volunteering at the dinner program for the homeless and the Franciscan Third Order, which was a lay religious order focused on service.

In spite of the many opportunities for bonding activity, several church members in both Catholic and Protestant churches expressed concern over the segmentation of the church community. Though the small groups provided a place of community, Silvia at Casa de Jesús mentioned that groups are divided geographically and she felt very disconnected from church members who lived in different geographical zones. In Catholic churches, while the Charismatic
Renewal was an important locus of bonding, it was also criticized by those not involved. One former youth leader at Cristo Rey explained that the problem was that the Charismatic Renewal is the main option for community for young adults but it did not appeal to some of them. He saw the movement as overly exclusive in the sense that it had “una actitud que si no estás de ellos, estás a un lado” (an attitude that if you are not with them, you are disregarded).

Bonding activity was a point of emphasis in each of the six churches to varying degrees. Across church communities people expressed the sentiment that their local church was their casa and a place to grow in friendship. They pointed to people that they could rely on to support them in their troubles and the feeling of welcome that encouraged their involvement. Of course, it is important to note that because of my research methodology of snowball sampling I had a selection bias toward people more involved in the church because they were easier to find and contact for interviews. So it is likely that particularly in the Catholic parishes there were members who shared the sentiment of the converts to Protestantism and found it difficult to find a sense of community in Catholic parishes.

3.2 Leadership Opportunities

The bonding activities were important to the churches in this study because of how they affected the church’s mission of social change. One area of influence was how bonding activities promoted lay leadership. The more connected members of the church community were, the more likely they were to assume leadership positions. Conversely, the more leadership roles a member assumed, the more connected they became in the church. Therefore, the bonding activities of a church and the growth of new leaders were closely interconnected. Within the churches, there were many potential areas for lay leadership including participation in religious ceremonies and
services, organizing community life, and being involved in church governance (Foley 2007). Assuming these leadership roles gives honor to Latinos who are marginalized in the larger society (Warner 2005). A well-bonded church environment can give opportunities to the resource-poor, particularly the opportunity for leadership that they would not have otherwise in society (Verba 1995). My findings show that this empowering influence was critical to promote social change. As more church members took initiative in developing the work of the church, its influence was more widespread. In general, churches best equipped and empowered members to lead in spiritual renewal and change. However, some church members did lead in the areas of material assistance and political change because they were empowered by their opportunities in the well-bonded church community.

Across the churches, members expressed the importance of lay leadership and the influence that it has had on their churches. Priests and pastors cast many visions of leadership in the church. The priest of Reina de Paz emphasized that “lay people are not collaborators – they are co-responsible.” Jorge, the pastor of Iglesia de Esperanza thought that his church’s specific role was one of leadership development. Because they were such a small church, he said that the tight-knit community was a perfect environment to raise leaders and prepare them to serve elsewhere. Jorge focused exclusively on spiritual leadership when he explained that he wanted to train leaders in the five Biblical ministries: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. The larger churches in my study carried out this commitment to lay leadership mostly in the different small groups, which were also the loci of bonding activity. That overlap was yet another example of how bonding activity and leadership opportunities reinforced each other.

In general, church members in this study were enthusiastic about and felt empowered by leadership opportunities. Those interviewed at Catholic parishes repeatedly asserted that

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10 This classification of Biblical ministries comes from Ephesians 4:11
laypeople filled many roles and helped the priest in a number of ways. Maria, a youth group leader at St. Anthony’s, said that providing the youth with different leadership roles makes them feel more involved. When they are responsible for a part of the group, they are more likely to come and be actively engaged. As one member of the church hierarchy mentioned, now “Hispanics are more aware that they can be leaders.” Because of the availability of opportunities to lead small groups, Protestant churches were particularly good at leadership development. Casa de Jesús specifically emphasized leadership development and one participant pointed out that each small group had five different leadership roles, which gave many people an opportunity to lead. She said that the fact that the church had “open arms to new leaders is a huge change for people from their original countries.” Perhaps the egalitarian ethos of American society promoted more equality in leadership opportunities. I do not have data to support this supposition but it may be a direction for future research.

These leaders were particularly effective when they were empowered to be entrepreneurial. Mariana, a material assistance program leader at Amor y Paz, was an excellent example of how bonding activity produced leadership opportunities that facilitated social change. The culture at Amor y Paz was driven by self-initiative and new ideas. An Anglo leader of material assistance at the church described the Latino community as “dynamic, they do so much.” When Mariana arrived at the church in 2012, she heard about the church’s desire to become more involved in the local community. At the time, there were no real leaders for that effort so she met with the pastor and volunteered to lead. Mariana was already equipped for the role because of her connections to the Latino community and the city through her job at a local newspaper. As she said, “God put me in this job so I can have these resources.” Because of the flexibility of the church structure to allow her to lead, she created a title of Outreach Director and
quickly innovated in many ways and drove the church’s involvement in service. She was already prepared with personal resources, but the church gave her an outlet to effect change and the strong community structure meant that church members formed a team of support. Thanks in part to her efforts and guidance, other church members started to generate ideas about ways to be involved in the community. She provided the impetus for broader action for social change, particularly through material assistance.

Although the message of well-developed leaders was empowering, the churches did not fully implement their ideals, typically because of structural issues such as perceptions of hierarchical roles and discrimination in the church. Although many church members at Reina de Paz and St. Anthony’s spoke about the importance of lay leadership, when pushed to discuss the concept they revealed a division between roles that lay leaders should fill and roles more appropriate for religious leadership. For example, one woman said that any political activism is the responsibility of religious leadership and she was unqualified to be involved. At Reina de Paz a group of older church participants mentioned a number of programs, including a group to support domestic workers, which disappeared once there were fewer nuns to lead the programs.

The Protestant churches had a slightly different problem, which was disagreement over whether their emphasis on leadership was too indiscriminate. For example, most of the members at Casa de Jesús highlighted the many leadership opportunities available to them because of the well-bonded community and the church’s promotion of small groups throughout the metro area. But Silvia, a long-time member, did not agree with this assessment. She said that many of the leaders lacked preparation and were simply fed information by the pastor. She said in the way they lead “no hay búsqueda ni creatividad” (there is neither search nor creativity). Silvia was concerned that the church had fallen into the false idea that anyone could lead, while in reality
“no todos son lideres” (not all are leaders). She suggested a more rigorous process to choose leaders and better preparation for those selected. For example, she recommended that only spiritually well-developed members should be leaders, not people who had only recently converted to Protestant Christianity. She also suggested leadership-specific classes instead of the current practice where members complete the levels of Bible school to qualify for a leadership position. If those changes were implemented, perhaps the church would be more effective in promoting social change particularly through spiritual transformation in the small groups.

In churches with Anglo populations there were also large discrepancies in leadership roles between Anglos and Latinos. St. Anthony’s was a case in point. Members of the Spanish-speaking community repeatedly expressed concern over the lack of Latino leadership in the parish. One young woman said delicately that the priest “is more inclined to call upon people he knows who can lead well.” When probed, she admitted that often meant leaders came from the Anglo community because he did not interact as much with the Latino community. All of the Latinos I interviewed expressed their willingness and availability to serve or lead if the priest called upon them, but it seemed that opportunities for such leadership were limited.

This inequality in leadership roles did not always create resentment. However, it most likely limited the extent of the Latino communities’ ability to engage in bringing about social change. An Anglo woman was in charge of social outreach at St. Anthony’s and Anabel, the Latina woman who helped her with translation, pointed out the great work that she was doing as a leader and said “la admiro mucho” (I admire her a lot). Similarly, an Anglo member of Cristo Rey noted that “it tends to be the case that non-Hispanics take charge of issues that affect Hispanics.” In that case, he was referring to the Anglo leadership on political advocacy related to housing and employment issues which directly affected local Latinos. Churches could not always
easily fix this disparity, but one might imagine that having a stronger Latino leadership could have helped them to more effectively work for social change through material assistance and political advocacy. I will discuss the issue of church unity and resource potential in the final chapter on linking activity under the church unity section.

Conventional wisdom among scholars and religious leaders is that churches provide opportunities for low-income and marginalized people to acquire skills like planning and leading meetings and bargaining, which can translate into activism in the broader community (See Verba et al. 1995, Warren 2003, Dahm 2004, Petersen 1996). In my interviews, church leadership sometimes supported this view that involvement in leadership in the church translated to involvement in the broader political or material assistance mechanisms of change. One leader in the church hierarchy mentioned his belief that the Charismatic Renewal was “a door to leadership in society” because of how it equipped uneducated and marginalized people to be inspirational leaders. In practice, I did not find much support for the idea. The priest of *Cristo Rey* expressed the idea of translatability of leadership more as a hope than as an already visible and tangible process. He said that the laity needed to be more proactive politically and not leave political leadership to the priests. As he said, “I don’t want to be an Oscar Romero.” Unfortunately, that hope was not yet realized. The example of Mariana’s leadership at *Amor y Paz* was more so one of skills acquired in society applied to running church programs in order to effect social change through the church. In these six churches, I did not find examples of Latinos who went from church leadership to leadership in society, but my research on that question was limited and incomplete since my discussion guides did not focus on the translatability of leadership. Leadership within the church might reinforce spiritual well-being and even support social programs, but it was unclear if it moved leaders beyond the locus of the church.
3.4 Reinforcing Spiritual Renewal and Strengthening Family

My research indicates that, by its very nature, bonding activity reinforced church doctrines and church activities. It promoted both spiritual renewal and family values, which churches believed were two important mechanisms of social change. Mooney agreed that in her study of Haitian immigrants, church community fortified individual faith and gave good support to families (Mooney 2009). This process of fortification and support was a natural part of the bonding activity in the churches in my study, particularly in small groups which involved faith sharing and prayer or focused specifically on supporting marriage.

The very purpose of small groups in these churches, which scholars would term examples of bonding activity, was to give spiritual fortification and reinforce specific doctrines. Some small groups were more doctrinal than others. The groups at Casa de Jesús all followed the same agenda, provided by the pastor, and therefore conformed to the same teachings. This conformity was especially relevant because it constantly reinforced doctrine affected members’ worldview and their ideas of social change (Weber 1963). In the case of Casa de Jesús, the reinforcement of the pastoral worldview in the smaller group context focused the congregation more on the spiritual mechanism of change and de-emphasized the role of material assistance because the pastor thought that spiritual renewal was most central to church activity.

But spiritual renewal was much more than simply conforming to and reinforcing the same doctrine. Moral transformations often occurred in the smaller group context. I described these transformations as a part of the spiritual renewal mechanism of change in the chapter on defining mechanisms of change. For example, the Charismatic Renewal at Cristo Rey invited to their weekend retreat five men who were alcoholics and spent time in the park next to the church.
Because of the prayer and spiritual energy of the weekend, they all decided to give up drinking. However, the pastor explained that a few months later he saw one man back on the street and said that although the spiritual aspect was important “people need more wholesome rehab, which includes therapy and job opportunities.” A man at *Amor y Paz* said that when he came to church God transformed him and he turned away from the bad activities in which he was engaged. Since coming to church, the fact that he could always call on someone in the community to help him with his struggles kept him morally upright and continued his renewal. A well-bonded church community was important in these contexts because it provided alternatives to other friendships and other communities. As previously mentioned, a youth leader at *Cristo Rey* explained that the church could prevent gang involvement if it gave a sense of community to youth.

Small groups also explicitly supported families. In fact, there were many programs especially for families within the church communities. For example, *Cristo Rey* had a Christian Family Movement that promoted the vocation of marriage. The three year course involved 20 couples in the church with the idea that these couples could learn from each other and be mentored in their vocation. The close relationships within the program supported couples through their marital struggles. Similarly, the Charismatic Renewal at *St Anthony’s* had a specific prayer group for married couples so that they could learn from and support each other. For the youth, *Reina de Paz* had a special group that encouraged teenagers and young adults to bridge the gap between their parents and society. As the priest of that parish mentioned, many parents lived in a “provincial world” and youth had a different perspective on the United States. The youth “need a space to talk about these issues and here at the parish they have a family they can trust.” Even in the groups that were not explicitly focused on marriage, the content often supported stable family life. For example, women in the Bible study I attended at *Amor y Paz*
spoke specifically about how women should communicate with husbands and children. There, women discussed various marital issues and received advice and support on how to respond to certain situations. One woman mentioned frustration with her child’s lack of respect and the group discussed what she could say. Another woman talked about the loss of freedom in marriage and her marital problems and the women tried to encourage her to persevere through those challenges. They both agreed that the advice and support of that community was useful.

Especially in the spiritual renewal and family mechanisms of change, bonding activity was inherently valuable. Through the well-bonded small groups, church members supported each other through moral transformations or family struggles. Ultimately, the churches believed that the transformation of these individual lives impacted society.

3.5 Pressure Encouraging Broader Involvement

Beyond its inherent value of creating environments of support for church members, the bonding activities explored in this study were also important for how they led to involvement in other areas. There is not a well-established link between bonding and outside involvement, which is why some scholars have argued that, while bridging activity can lead to political involvement, bonding activity does not have the same connection (Ramirez 2007). In my research, I found that bonding activity did carry with it a pressure for members to be more involved in church activities. The issue in terms of broader involvement was how that pressure was channeled and whether church programs were available to members to get involved. In Miami, Stepick found that some churches promoted civic engagement through recruiting new members, bonding them to each other and finally by bridging them to outreach activities (Stepick 2009). In my research, when programs were available that encouraged participation in each
mechanism of social change, church members participated simply to be more involved in the church and not necessarily because they were especially interested in that activity. The six churches in this study had different levels of participation opportunities, which I will discuss further in the chapter on bridging activity. This section will focus on involvement pressure itself.

Initially, church members were pressured to get involved in the aspects of the church that focused on spiritual renewal. The pressure was especially strong in Protestant churches. In addition to weekend services, these churches offered other services as well as Bible studies throughout the week and expected attendance at all of those activities. During the announcements at *Amor y Paz*, the pastor would often explain the weekly events and make comments such as “si no vienes, estás perdiendo que Dios está edificando su vida” (if you don’t come, you are missing out on God edifying your life). He would challenge people to go to the Bible classes in order to work at being disciples. The new pastor at *Casa de Jesús* had enacted structural changes in the past few years that changed the types of activities but not lessened the involvement pressure. Before, there were services every night from Wednesday through Sunday. Now, there are smaller prayer groups on Fridays, Bible school on Saturdays, and church on Sundays and members were expected to attend all events. One pastor described going to Bible school as a chance to prepare for spiritual battle and said “el trabajo no es una excusa para no venir a la iglesia” (work is no excuse to not come to church). The pastor of *Iglesia de Esperanza* did not make as many explicit statements of why members should come regularly but, given that the church was so small, implicit social pressure encouraged members to attend the Thursday night prayer group and Saturday Bible study in addition to the Sunday service. Catholic parishes were less obvious in their statements but still pressured members to be involved. At the group for elderly members at *Reina de Paz*, the women were concerned when someone did not attend and
discussed why they had not come. As previously mentioned, Luis at *Cristo Rey* observed that once a parishioner discovers that they can be involved in more activities than just mass then they discover the church community. In particular, the Charismatic Renewal in these parishes expected regular participation in spiritual renewal activities. Each of the six churches had some expectation that members would become involved outside of Sunday services, which supported their mission of spiritual renewal.

Latino churches in my research project developed this involvement pressure despite the fact that many immigrants worked multiple jobs and therefore might truly be too busy to attend church regularly. As cited above, they believed that work was no excuse to not come to church. In interviews, church members would mention that some people did not attend church because of work – but would later say that “el trabajo es un pretext” (work was just a pretext) for not coming. Anabel at *St. Anthony’s* said that she did not think that busyness with work was a legitimate excuse for not coming to church because they could come after work. On the other hand, the priest at *Cristo Rey* said that his church was conscious of this barrier to involvement and the parish was expanding their Wednesday services for those who are unable to attend church on Sundays. One woman who attended a small group at *Casa de Jesús* but was unable to attend church on Sundays was grateful that she could attend the groups because she wanted to go to church but could not because she had to work to send money to her family in Honduras. For her, work was not an excuse but a legitimate barrier to church involvement.

As a researcher, I grew to understand the involvement pressure through my own experience of it. I constantly heard pastors encourage more participation and many church members asked me whether I was coming to church service the next week or to the midweek event. Over the course of my research I started to feel obligated to attend activities even though
they were not necessarily helpful to my project. Only when I stopped for self-reflection did I realize the impracticality of fully participating in six different church communities that decided not to yield to pressure. Even so, I felt guilty when church members saw me volunteering at the homeless dinner program and asked why I was not going to the all-night vigil afterwards or when I attended a church one week and then missed a few Sundays of services to attend other churches. I felt that pressure just as someone looking to these churches as sources of information and locations of research. The pressure must be much more acute for those who look to churches as sources of community and therefore must attend to maintain their community connections.

Although this pressure existed in all six of the churches, only Amor y Paz and Cristo Rey effectively channeled it into involvement in programs that extended outside of the church community. Both were effective in this way because they had a tradition of service in the church and had programs that required regular volunteer assistance and were thus natural avenues of involvement. The members of Amor y Paz explained that a previous pastor emphasized involvement in the community and “preparó a las ovejas a servir en muchos lugares” (prepared the sheep to serve in many places). When turnover divided the church and weakened their excitement, participation in service activities also decreased. However, with the culture of involvement already inculcated, once the community came back together with excitement, they became re-involved in material assistance in the community. In particular, the Latino community was very involved in the Food Pantry that the Baptist church collectively ran between all of the language congregations. The same announcements that encouraged involvement in weekly prayer services or Bible studies also constantly reminded participants that by working in the Food Pantry they were serving God.
Church members internalized this message. Adolfo, a new member of Amor y paz who had recently had a spiritual transformation, explained that he was involved in as many church activities as possible because he wanted to meet people in the church and because “quiero ocuparme con las cosas de Dios” (I want to occupy myself with God’s affairs). He thought that serving weekly at the Food Pantry fit into that general category along with going to Wednesday night services and Sunday morning prayer. Luis at Cristo Rey provided a similar analysis of his involvement. After his spiritual transformation in which he left alcohol, he wanted to participate more in the church so he became involved in the choir, the dinner program for the homeless and later in the 3rd order Franciscans, which is a lay branch of the Franciscan order. His point of emphasis was involvement in the church and not necessarily which specific activity he pursued. He also explained the desire to meet other church members and make friends. There was certainly a social aspect to church service, which I observed at the dinner program in Cristo Rey. There, many of the young Latino men who volunteered were friends and although they expressed a number of reasons for participating they also came as a part of their social time. This reason for involvement did not diminish the force of their motivations.

My research shows that well-bonded communities acted together in available programs. Some churches occasionally had material assistance programs, but they did not occur regularly enough nor did require enough volunteers to benefit from involvement pressure. Bonding activities of a church had great potential to encourage members to work in the material assistance mechanism of social change, but only if churches had structures designed to encourage such involvement. The next chapter on bridging activities will explore to what extent these structures were in place and in what other ways churches were involved in their local communities.
Chapter 4: “La Comunidad Tiene Mucha Necesidad”

(Bridging Activity)

One member of Cristo Rey explained that their church is “about community,” which meant not just the parishioners but also the surrounding neighborhood. To engage in that way, churches in my study moved from bonding to bridging – from a focus on the lives of church members to the life of the local community. In these churches, the surrounding community could be Latino or Anglo or could be composed of other minority cultures. In general, bonding activities connect socially similar people and bridging activities connect people who are different in some way. However, scholars have varying definitions of what qualifies as bridging. Szreter defines it as activity that connects people in a network who come from a range of backgrounds (Szreter 2002). Stepick distinguishes it from bonding and linking by indicating that bridging activities aim at reaching out to people who are socially different in some way but who have similar levels of resource access (Stepick 2009). In these definitions, bridging activities can happen within the church. For example, people of different classes are at times in the same congregation and therefore bonding activity is inherently bridging to people of different social and economic status (Foley 2007).

In this thesis, I adopt the general idea of bridging as reaching out to people who are socially different. However, my conceptualization allows for flexibility in how different people have to be for their relations to qualify as bridging activity. Specifically, I define bridging activity as people in a particular church reaching out to non-church members in the local community. For some scholars, this definition would be inadequate because a poor Latino church reaching out to poor Latino neighbors does not necessarily involve connections between people
with different backgrounds. However, in my study involvement in a church did make a difference in social life and activity to the extent that church members are somewhat distinct from those who do not belong to the church. The church shaped actions, perceptions, and resource access. Therefore, church efforts to reach out to the community, regardless of the demographic or socio-economic makeup of that community, were bridging actions, often with the goal of promoting social change through one of the four mechanisms (spiritual, family, material, or political).

Scholars value this bridging activity because of how it is related to civic engagement. Bridging activity creates what Stepick calls “civic social capital”, which is when connections facilitate civic activity (Stepick 2009). In this research, as churches reached out to their local communities, they engaged in the civic sphere that extends beyond their congregation. Therefore, they worked for social change not only for their own members but also for the neighborhood as a whole.

This chapter explores factors promoting bridging activity and analyzes the ways the churches engaged in this activity. First, I discuss the neighborhood locations of the different churches and identify the needs and opportunities in those locations. Second, I describe the evangelization programs of churches that seek to create social change in the community through spiritual renewal. Third, I look at service programs that gave material assistance in the neighborhood and therefore tried to create change through that avenue.

4.1 Neighborhood Location and Local Community

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11 Here I follow Adler and Goggin’s definition of civic engagement: “civic engagement refers to the ways in which citizens participate in the life of a community in order to improve conditions for others or to help shape the community’s future” (Adler and Goggin 2005:236).
Since this thesis looks at bridging activity particularly in terms of relations with the church’s neighborhood, the church location shaped potential church activity. As I briefly explained in my discussion of site selection, the churches in this study were located in a number of different neighborhoods, not all of which were majority Latino. The church related differently to the neighborhood depending on community needs and the extent to which church members were part of that community. Stepick points out that the context of reception also shapes bridging activity in terms of the availability of means to engage civically in the local community (Stepick 2009). I found in my research that in general, churches that were in more economically needy neighborhoods and who had members that lived in the neighborhood tended to be more locally involved, though there were varying levels of involvement within that general trend.

**Community Needs**

Three of the six churches in this study held services in neighborhoods with significant economic needs. *Amor y Paz* was located in a neighborhood in Northern Virginia that had a high Latino population and was a common place for newly arriving immigrants to live. One Anglo leader of social programs in the church outlined a number of problems in the community including day laborers who had unstable incomes and crowded apartment. She accused many landlords of making “money off of others’ suffering” because they rented out space on the floor for day laborers to sleep the night. Mariana, the Latino leader of social programs agreed that “the church is located in the middle of a community with lots of needs and we need to do more.”

*Cristo Rey* was in a neighborhood in DC that was historically needy in similar ways, but had recently undergone demographic change and gentrification. According to the Census Bureau’s, rent prices increased by 31% from 2000 to 2007 (Bloch 2010). The priest of *Cristo Rey* said that because of the increasing rents, many parishioners had moved to Maryland and
Virginia. The neighborhood used to be primarily Latino and African American but in the last ten years the white population share of the neighborhood had grown by 25% (Petrilli 2012). Because of more expensive developments in the neighborhood, the priest of Cristo Rey said that “a huge issue in the community is lack of housing.” The church was surrounded by many different types of residences, including single family homes, condos, and housing projects.

There were many homeless men who spent time in the area directly surrounding the church and some might have been suffering from the housing shortage. But not all were there because of gentrification. As one church member said, referring to the long-running homelessness issues, “people have been on the sidewalk as long as I’ve been here.” This presence of homeless men was a controversial issue in the community. The parish was located across the street from the park and next to a playground where many homeless men congregated, but the church was not officially responsible for the spaces. A parent from a local charter school became upset at the presence of homeless men at a park across the street from the church and she argued that Cristo Rey was responsible. A woman from the church who advocated on behalf of the homeless explained to me that this tension was part of the issue of gentrification in the neighborhood.

In fact, research at other churches revealed that conflict over the presence of the homeless near the church was not constrained to the new richer neighbors. A few people at other churches mentioned that they did not enjoy going to Cristo Rey as much because of the homeless and the dirtier feel of the church. One member of Casa de Jesús who lived in the neighborhood of Cristo Rey said that the men who spend time around the parish were often drunk and caused problems for school children. She thought that the men would have been able to get jobs if not for their vices and in its service Cristo Rey was enabling them. A number leaders and members at Cristo
Rey acknowledged that people in the church were also hesitant about the presence of homeless near the church. Several leaders thought that the need around the church was an impetus to reach out to the community and engage in bridging activity by offering space for a day shelter and an emergency hypothermia night shelter as well as running a dinner program every day, but that action was at times controversial in the neighborhood and the church.

*St Anthony’s* location had many similarities with that of *Cristo Rey*. Both were located in historically poor Latino neighborhoods that were undergoing gentrification. As one Latino parishioner at *St Anthony’s* pointed out, the church “está en el corazón de [el barrio] con mucha gente en su alrededor” (the church is in the heart of this neighborhood with many people surrounding it). By this comment he meant that the Latino presence should be stronger at the church given that so many Latinos live in the immediate surroundings. The priest at *St Anthony’s* predicted that the number of Latino parishioners would shrink in the coming years because of neighborhood changes, even though there were some efforts in the community to promote mixed income housing. This gentrification had not progressed as much as it had at *Cristo Rey* and the neighborhood was still relatively poor.

One difference between *St Anthony’s* and *Cristo Rey* was the sharp distinction between the rich and the poor in the neighborhood. The blocks immediately surrounding *St. Anthony’s* included a poor Latino enclave but those who lived outside the bounds of that community were extremely wealthy. For example, the median income in the surrounding census block was $42,245 whereas the next closest census block had a median income of $142,237 (Bloch 2010). Both blocks were in the parish boundaries and people from both demographics attended *St Anthony’s*. The director of social outreach at the church explained that “the neighborhood is characterized by a juxtaposition of people who have with people who don’t have.” She told a
story of people who bought brand new clothing to put on a scarecrow for the community fall fair as an example of the extreme wealth that was typical of the nearby neighborhoods. At the same time, many people in the neighborhood did have significant needs and they asked at the church because, as she said, “churches are known. This is where people go to get help.” She explained that because of their location they were accessible to people with these kinds of needs. In some ways, St Anthony’s was in a neighborhood with similar economic needs to Cristo Rey, but they were much less involved in material assistance, as I will explain in the section of this chapter on programs meeting material needs. Cristo Rey served in spite of the tension of gentrification and new wealth in contrast to the poor neighbors but St Anthony’s was limited in their outreach in part because of the clash between wealth and poverty that seemed to constrain their options for civic engagement, as Stepick pointed out in his research.

By contrast, Reina de Paz, Casa de Jesús and Iglesia de Esperanza were all located in majority Anglo neighborhoods of average or above-average affluence. Casa de Jesús and Iglesia de Esperanza were both in Northern Virginia in upper middle-class neighborhoods. However, Casa de Jesús did not envision its church building as a locus of ministry but more so the small groups that met generally on Friday nights. The purpose of the small groups, as one church participant explained, was to have a presence where they were located, which tended to be in poorer Latino-majority neighborhoods. Iglesia de Esperanza varied in its location because it was such a small church. The pastor held weekly prayer meetings in his apartment, which was in a poorer neighborhood, and the church occasionally hosted events in a neighborhood closer to Amor y Paz. At its founding, Reina de Paz was in a primarily poorer Latino neighborhood but since the communities had changed they were now also in an upper middle-class neighborhood.
These churches tended to bridge less to the community in part because the surrounding neighborhoods were not as needy.

**Presence in Community**

Beyond the church location, this study found that whether congregants lived in the local community or commuted long distances to church affected their ability to engage in bridging activity in the community. In general, churches where members saw themselves as part of the surrounding neighborhood were more involved in bridging activity than churches where members commuted to church. This difference appeared in how church members and leaders described the area. One woman at *Cristo Rey* said that the church is all “about community, which means the parishioners but also the surrounding neighborhood.” That identification placed the congregants in the neighborhood, while by contrast the priest at *Reina de Paz* talked about the fact that the church used to be in a Latino barrio and then the neighborhood changes “chased the Latinos away.” When asked whether they drove or walked to church, most parishioners in each of the churches responded that they drove. Even at *St Anthony’s*, which was in a majority Latino neighborhood, the priest explained that many members used to live in the neighborhood but moved away. Therefore, the Spanish mass was composed of more commuters when compared to the English mass, which was more local.

The presence of congregants in the neighborhood affected both how they identified with the area surrounding their church and their ability to be involved in activities during the week. When I held a focus group at *Reina de Paz* with elderly members on a Friday morning, most of the participants said that they walked or took a short bus ride to church because they lived relatively close. However, there was a selection bias in that data because those who were able to attend a Friday morning group tended to be those who lived more locally. Most others at *Reina*
*de Paz* reported commuting long distances to church and the priest described that commute as a problem. For example, one leader of a prayer group that met on Sunday afternoons said that she used to live within walking distance of the church but had since moved to the Maryland suburbs. She explained that she would like to go to church events during the week such as the *Via crucis* (Stations of the Cross) but she could not make it because of traffic. She said that “cuando estuve en Washington iba todos los días a la iglesia” (when I was in Washington I used to go every day to the church). The previous section on bonding activity discussed how involvement pressure can channel into material assistance programs with more of a bridging focus. However, in this study, when congregants could not be present at the church then they could not be involved in as great of a variety of programs.

Commuting to church also affected relations with the neighborhoods because of parking issues. *Cristo Rey* and *Reina de Paz* pointed especially to this problem. In fact, the parking problem at *Cristo Rey* required the church, in partnership with other congregations, to negotiate with a local business for reduced parking rates on Sundays. At *Reina de Paz* the fact that churchgoers commuted in and occupied parking was a source of tension and the priest said that the neighbors used to complain about the church. However, he recently began an English mass (previously all of the masses were in Spanish) to help relations with the neighborhood and alleviate the complaints. He said that the English mass had helped relations with neighbors because “now they can see us.”

Visibility and presence in the neighborhoods were not determined merely by whether congregants live locally. Part of that presence also came from how churches use their space to promote bridging activity. In fact, one of the roles that worship communities have in larger society is through their service hosting different programs in their space (Foley 2007). Only two
Catholic parishes in my study engaged in this hosting of different events. *Reina de Paz* hosted neighborhood community meetings and an English-speaking AA group. *Cristo Rey* also hosted AA meetings in their basement. This involvement could be both because Catholic churches are better-resourced to provide space and that they are less sectarian in their theology and thus more willing to partner with or provide support to other organizations (Kniss 2007).

### 4.2 Evangelization Programs in the Community

While the church location shaped how churches engaged in bridging activity in the local community, the extent to which the church had well-structured programs also affected how bridging activity occurred. One would think that theological views on the relative importance of spiritual or material social change would be a potential source of difference in terms of a tendency toward evangelization or a tendency toward material assistance. However, this study found surprising variation between churches in the degree of structure to their evangelization programs. Even churches that specifically emphasized prayer and evangelization as primary means of social change did not necessarily have programs for evangelization. Rather, they encouraged that action on a personal level. Contrast that with churches that had more structured service programs and at least somewhat more structured evangelization. In particular, Catholic churches were more likely to have these programs structured than Protestant ones. All churches expressed the importance of spiritual renewal as a mechanism of social change. For them, evangelism programs were the bridging activities necessary to bring that spiritual renewal to people who are not church members in some cases by converting them but mostly by helping them re-discover and deepen their religious beliefs.
Structured programs ranged from specific groups focused on evangelization to special events that tried to reach out to the community. *St Anthony’s*, for example, had a group called Legion of Mary with nine members who spent two hours a week knocking on doors, visiting the sick, and giving information in the streets. They especially talked about baptism with parents because, as the priest at *St Anthony’s* pointed out, many parents in the neighborhood had not baptized their children. Others in the church expressed support for these women, but in general the program was very small so the majority of the parish was not involved in these activities. Maria, a youth leader, explained that having youth evangelize might be more appealing to people receiving the message but the youth were too timid about their knowledge to want to go to the community to reach out. The priest at *Cristo Rey* did not outline a regular evangelization program but did give examples of larger events that serve as evangelization opportunities, such as door to door voter registration drives, which church members saw as a chance for evangelism. Similarly, before Palm Sunday the church sent mixed race groups into different areas of the neighborhood to hand out brochures and invite people to the Easter services. Protestant churches had larger events as well. *Amor y Paz* had a special evangelism event where they reached out to neighbors and prayed for them. At the same time, they also thought that their material assistance was an opportunity for evangelism so in that way their bridging activities supported both material and spiritual social change. *Casa de Jesús* had structured evangelism in the form of a radio program, but church leadership ran that program so it did not offer an opportunity for church participants to be involved in bridging activities in the form of evangelism.

The Protestant churches emphasized personal evangelism more than activity within church structures. In one of his sermons, the pastor of *Casa de Jesús* encouraged the church members to “romper barreras culturales y idiomáticas” (break cultural and language barriers) to
share Christian precepts with people who had not yet heard them. He even suggested learning Mongolian to share Christian beliefs with Mongolians. Many of the church participants at Casa de Jesús echoed his message that their personal role in the community was to “llevar la palabra a todos” (bring the word to all). Bringing the word to them meant telling everybody of Christian beliefs. This focus on the personal mission of social change in this bridging activity emerged relatively recently. As Silvia at Casa de Jesús explained, previously the church was more involved in street or door-to-door evangelism. Now the church model focused more on small prayer groups throughout Maryland, Virginia, and DC and evangelism focused on the friends of those in the groups. Similarly, Iglesia de Esperanza mostly attracted new members who were friends, family, or co-workers of previous members. They did not have any formal structure of evangelism. My research is inconclusive on whether structure or personal encouragement is more effective in terms of involving church members in evangelism and more research on that topic may be helpful to add to understanding of social change.

4.3 Programs Meeting Material Needs

In spite of churches’ focus on evangelization and related emphasis on spiritual renewal as a way of social change, scholars often focus more on material outreach programs than on spiritual ones (e.g. Foley 2007). It is important to consider the many mechanisms of social change and in my research material assistance programs were a critical aspect of promoting social change and formal bridging activity to the local community. Latinos, in theory, supported this idea of bridging to the neighborhood through these types of material assistance programs. One survey found that 60% of Latino Catholics think that the Church should be engaged in the community in this way (Pantoja et al 2008). However, this bridging activity to the community
takes many forms with different levels of formality. Often, immigrant congregations provide more informal and indirect material aid than formal and direct assistance (Kniss 2007). As Foley explained, better-resourced congregations are generally more involved than poorer ones. Catholic parishes can provide more material assistance because they have more financial and institutional support in those efforts (Foley 2007). While indirect social services are often valuable, they tend to focus on members of the church and not the broader community. Therefore, this section will explain the structured programs that promoted involvement of Latinos in material service to the community through the locus of the church.

Three of the churches in this study had significant Anglo populations and two of those three were the principal sites that had formal community service programs. None of the churches that were only Latino had robust and structured material assistance. There were a number of factors that affected the presence or absence of material assistance programs including resources, church philosophy and culture, leadership, and structures. Each variable reinforced the others to shape church activity.

**Resources**

One possible reason for the disparity in this study between service programs at churches with Anglo populations and without is Foley’s argument that better-resourced churches can provide more material goods (Foley 2007). The Anglo communities in these churches often gave resources to support material assistance programs. As the priest at Cristo Rey mentioned, Anglos were on the board to collect money for the homeless dinner program, while Latinos formed the bulk of the volunteers. He understood these different roles as an expression of how each group could best serve. The young professionals in the English-speaking population often travelled and were too busy to serve but had greater resource access than the Latinos. Churches that did not
have an Anglo population, such as Iglesia de Esperanza, may not have had the resources to be as involved in service. Jorge, the pastor of Iglesia de Esperanza said that because of their size they did not have the financial sway to offer material assistance to the community. This issue of resource access within the church is further discussed in the chapter on linking activity, because linking activity explains how populations with different levels of resources relate. In general, though, it seemed in my study that Foley’s assessment was correct in that resource availability was an important variable in the ability of immigrant congregations to provide material assistance to the neighborhood.

**Church Culture**

Resources were not the only issue because their use depended in part on the church’s attitude or philosophy toward service. For example, Casa de Jesús was a larger, well-resourced Latino church but the church teaching focused primarily on spiritual renewal, families, and politics as the ways of social change. The two churches that did have material assistance programs had a church culture that emphasized material assistance as a critical way of social change. When I asked one Anglo social service leader at Amor y Paz why Latinos were so involved in volunteering for the Food Pantry there, she described what she called a “contagious mindset” of service and said that it “must have always been that way” because of church culture. Different people at Amor y Paz pointed to different variables to possibly explain the service-oriented mindset such as leadership or location or theology but ultimately they agreed that it was just a fundamental part of the church philosophy. In my research, once a church had a particular culture or philosophy on service, it tended to attract new members with the same philosophy, so the attitude toward service reproduced itself. Members of Cristo Rey described that phenomenon to me because the parish was well-known as a locus of service activity. In fact, Cristo Rey had
that culture in part because it was run by a community of Capuchin friars who focused on material service as a critical method of social change. A Capuchin brother at *Cristo Rey* explained that his goal for the church was to “bring parishioners into relationship with the people around them because the parish is the larger community.” He emphasized that “we want to support movement outside.” Viewing the parish in the sense of the broader neighborhood and not as the already-existing members inherently promoted bridging activities.

Naturally, churches that did not emphasize material service lacked this kind of bridging activity. For example, a leader at *St. Anthony’s* who spearheaded their service efforts told me that, as a church “we haven’t gotten into social justice. Mainly because people haven’t taken it on and are busy with other things.” She was not extremely concerned by the fact that, as she said, “we are not a social justice parish,” because she thought that other parishes in the area fulfilled that role. Interestingly, a leader at the diocese level criticized this view and said that *St Anthony’s* needed to provide more support to the surrounding Latino community. He thought that the church culture played a large role in this lack of support and said that the problem was that “wealthy families are allergic to those who are minorities.”

**Leadership**

In this study, church attitude was not the only factor explaining the presence or absence of programming. Leadership for these programs also determined their level of activity. Even in *Casa de Jesús*, which had no regular material service to the neighborhood and whose teaching did not focus on material service, many church members expressed the importance of this sort of service as part of their Christian call. When asked, a number said that they wished that the church offered more such services and was more involved in bridging activity toward the community through this material assistance. Silvia was particularly vocal and said that
evangelicals did not do as good of a job at being involved in the community as Catholics and evangelicals should improve this area of their activity. However, when I asked if she would consider leading that sort of effort she replied that she would be concerned to contradict the pastor’s stance. She mentioned, “podría tener metas pero si mi pastor no las tiene, no lo puedo hacer” (I could have goals but if my pastor does not have them, I cannot do it.) This perspective was consistent with Weber’s observation that leadership often determines the church’s agenda (Weber 1963).

Leadership was not just an issue in terms of whether church members and church leaders shared the same view of the importance of material social service. The empowerment of leaders also affected potential for bridging activity. At Reina de Paz, for example, both the priest and the members consistently articulated the importance of material assistance. However, the church was not currently active in this form of community involvement. When asked about previous programs, the elderly women in a focus group talked at length about a clothing Bazaar that used to happen yearly but no longer existed because when one leader was away travelling no one else stepped into leadership to effectively assume the responsibility for extensive work and organization. They also gave an example of a domestic workers’ group to support the women who worked in embassies, but said that the group ended when the religious sister in charge died and there were no other sisters to support the effort. At that church in particular, members expressed hesitancy in interviews to be involved in work that they considered more the purview of vowed religious. One woman explained that “Los laicos no pueden hacer lo mismo que los religiosos” (The lay people cannot do the same as the religious). This view may have contributed to their lack of leadership and therefore their lack of social programs. This issue of leadership
relates to the description in the section on bonding activity that explored how leaders were formed and whether there were opportunities for leadership within the church.

Even within the churches that did have robust material service programs, opportunities for Latino leadership could still be improved to increase their ownership of the programs. At Amor y Paz a church member explained that “El Food Pantry es de ‘ellos’ los americanos. No de nosotros” (The food pantry is theirs, the Americans’. Not ours.) She expressed this view in spite of the fact that Latinos were very involved as volunteers and coordinators in the program. Ultimately, the English-speaking community started the Food Pantry and therefore she did not think that Latinos could claim credit for its work. Similarly, the board that ran the homeless dinner program at Cristo Rey was mostly composed of Anglo members except for the priest and one Latina woman. Both churches that were not involved in service and those already active would do well to encourage greater Latino leadership to expand their programs and the sense of ownership among the Latino community.

Structures

The preceding explanations mostly focused on why churches have particular material assistance. But it is also important to understand why Latinos were involved in these programs. My research seemed to demonstrate that Latino involvement occurred when structures were in place in which they could be easily involved. This phenomenon arises from what the chapter on bonding activity described as involvement pressure that then led to participation in church activities. Church members participated in activities simply to become more involved in the church. When this pressure was directed toward activities that involve material assistance, Latino church members were involved. The key to this direction was to provide regular volunteer opportunities at convenient times that allowed for social interaction with other church members.
For example, the two churches that had a high level of Latino involvement both saw that involvement in their food distribution programs. At Cristo Rey, the dinner program required volunteers every day in the early evening and church members did not need to make a formal commitment to attend. They could simply arrive and serve. Many church members offered theories on why Latinos were so involved in the dinner program. A number of Anglo church members theorized that it was part of a recognition that they were serving their co-ethnics. However, program structure seems to be a large variable. At Amor y Paz, the Food Pantry ran for a few hours every Saturday morning and church members could commit to as many or as few Saturdays as they wanted. Both environments provided space for social interaction between the church members while they served the people who came to the programs. Particularly in the Food Pantry, the presence of Spanish-speaking volunteers was critical to the mostly-Latino clientele. As the director of the Food Pantry mentioned, now that there were Spanish-speaking volunteers, clients relaxed and opened up more than before when they were “strangers in a strange land.” In both cases, the fact that there was a structure in place in which church members could be involved naturally encouraged participation.

This structure in and of itself was necessary but not sufficient. For example, the Food Pantry existed in the parent congregation of Amor y Paz since 1975 but only in the last two years had the Latino community been very involved in its operations. In this case, it was because of Mariana, who was a leader in the Latino community who started volunteering regularly at the Food Pantry. As she became involved, she was a catalyst for broader Latino participation. As she said, with her as a bridge it was easier to encourage Latino involvement in those programs. In my research, it took both a structure and an entrée for Latinos to become involved in these material social services. These structures developed a feedback loop with church culture, where church
cultures that were more supportive of material service were more likely to develop these structures while churches with these structures were more likely to have a church culture of material service.

Compare the involvement at *Cristo Rey* and *Amor y Paz* with the lack of Latino involvement in what material social programs did exist at *St. Anthony’s*. Part of the problem was the lack of structure for involvement. For example, most of the material aid at *St. Anthony’s* was financial assistance for people who needed to pay for rent or other expenses. The church had formalized this program for assistance and a woman with experience in social service directed it. This assistance was critical to meet the needs of people in the community therefore in some ways promoting social change. However, most of the regular bridging activity in the church occurred in this program, which did not require other volunteers. Therefore, Latinos were not involved in supporting this program. The second barrier to involvement was the lack of entrée in the one-time service programs that did occur. For example, the church hosted a yearly clothing drive where they donated clothing to people in the local community. However, Anabel, one of the Latino leaders at *St. Anthony’s*, said that Latinos were not invited to help in the drive. The bulletin had an announcement calling for volunteers but it was in English and so no one in the Latino community thought it applied to them. As Anabel said, 90% of people who come to get clothes were Latino but the volunteers were mostly Anglo. When I attended the clothing drive, there were three volunteers from the Latino community but she was accurate in that the vast majority of volunteers were Anglos. If *Amor y Paz* was an example of the need for structure and entrée to promote involvement, *St. Anthony’s* was showed that when such structures and entrées are not available, Latinos are not as involved in material assistance programs that bridge to the local community.
In Summary

No single variable fully explains why some churches engaged in more bridging activity and whether their bridging activity was directed more toward spiritual growth or toward material social service. A combination of these variables shaped church activity in this study. The neighborhood location, congregants’ presence in the neighborhood, philosophy on social change, resources, culture, leadership, and structures all combined to determine the decisions that leaders and members made in terms of involvement in certain activities. It would be beneficial for these churches to examine to what extent leadership and structures contributed to shaping these situations. In particular, churches might consider both how they provide opportunities for willing congregants to be involved in bridging activity and how they create structures that encourage involvement even for those who would not have otherwise pursued bridging activity to the local community.
Chapter 5: “De Adentro hacia Afuera” (Linking Activity)

When talking about the need for individual spiritual renewal in order to later move out and serve communities, the pastor of Amor y Paz explained that we have to go “de adentro hacia afuera” (from within to without). Although he was specifically referring to individual faith, his concept can be applied more broadly to the life of a church. Churches initially draw together as a community but in order to effect social change must also work in their local community. Ultimately, churches reach afuera, or without, to people of different levels of resources. This activity is called linking activity.

Certain mechanisms of social change, such as material assistance, require more financial resources than other mechanisms, such as spiritual renewal. In order to obtain resources to promote the more resource-intensive ways of social change, churches engage in linking activity. Of bonding, bridging, and linking activities, linking activity is the newest term in social science. Michael Woolcock introduced this category of activity in his article entitled “Social Capital and Economic Development” when he mentioned that these ties of linkage connected communities to groups outside of their community (Woolcock 1998). Szreter defines linking precisely as “relationships of exchange” that occur between people who are dissimilar and who also have different levels of resource access (Szreter 2002: 579). As indicated in the previous chapter, bridging activity entails relationships between dissimilar people who have similar resource access. Therefore, the relationship between church members and the surrounding community can fall under the bridging activity category. Linking activity distinguishes itself from the other two categories for its greater access to resources.

Churches in this study had a number of avenues through which they could engage in linking activity. First, they could and at times did connect to other resources through
relationships with churches that had either more or different resources. Second, churches that had both Latino and Anglo populations linked simply by promoting greater church unity. Both of these activities resulted in access to greater resources needed to provide material assistance. Finally, the political mechanism of social change was inherently a linking activity because interaction between people and the government was an interaction between groups with different levels of resource access.

5.1 Relations with Other Churches

My research indicates that relations with other churches were underexploited resources to develop service programs. There was a mutual reinforcement between engagement with other churches and robust service programs. Often, churches formed associations in order to perform service tasks and therefore the commitment to service provided a basis for relations between churches. For example, churches might partner to gather and distribute food or raise rent money. At the same time, churches that tended to be more open these associations were able to develop an infrastructure of service. However, linking activity did not only support service in my research and sometimes this activity reinforced and strengthened evangelistic efforts or work in spiritual renewal.

Emphasis on particular mechanisms of social change also affected the extent of relationships between churches especially in terms of relations between Protestants and Catholics. Some churches, such as Pentecostals, focused largely on prayer and conversion as means of social change. They tried to stay religiously pure, or sectarian, which deterred alliances with other churches in social causes (Kniss 2007). In these cases, they did not make use of their potential church partnerships. In part because of this trend toward sectarianism, there was a
marked difference in my research in the linking activity of Protestant churches and Catholic parishes. Catholic parishes tended to be less sectarian and therefore tended to partner with a greater variety of churches. The issue of sectarianism was a strong divider between Protestant Latinos and Catholic Latinos. But it can also be a barrier between Anglo Protestant churches and Latino Protestant churches. As Levitt explains, Catholics are more used to incorporating new immigrant groups whereas mainline and evangelical Protestants have less experience and are also hesitant to interact with the version of Protestantism that immigrants bring (Levitt 2007).

**Partnership in Social Change**

Many of the relations with other churches in this study occurred in the context of service or political activity, though they occasionally involved programs to promote spiritual renewal. Often, churches in a neighborhood worked together on issues that affect the neighborhood either through providing resources or working together on advocacy or even collaborating on spiritual outreach. As an example of service partnerships, *St Anthony’s* collected food donations and rather than distributing the food themselves they gave it to a food bank for the homeless in DC or to a local Episcopalian church that had a food pantry. If someone came to *St Anthony’s* in need of food, they would refer them to that Episcopalian church because that church was better equipped to provide that particular service. Similarly, if someone came with a need for rent money, the director of social outreach called other churches to look for donations. From the perspective of political activity, *Cristo Rey* participated in a multi-church political advocacy group called the Washington Interfaith Network (WIN). From the perspective of spiritual renewal, the pastor of *Iglesia de Esperanza* partnered with two pastors of Anglo churches to do an evangelism event that also incorporated giving away King Soopers cards to people who came. His presence was important because of his familiarity with the Latino community and ability to
connect to his co-ethnics. This evangelization partnership seemed to happen only sporadically or as a one-time event activity rather than a regular partnership.

Partnerships that occurred on a more regular basis often incorporated not just for financial resources but also volunteer support. Amor y Paz had a formal volunteer partnership with a local Anglican church and another Baptist church, neither of which had a significant Latino population. There were also volunteers from many other churches. For example, one family of volunteers attended a Catholic parish in DC but lived close to Amor y Paz in Virginia so they volunteered at the Food Pantry. This partnership to provide volunteer support was another example of how people became involved because there were structures in place available for participation. Since there were activities in which people from other churches could be involved, they become involved and the Latino communities engaged in linking activity.

Just because many partnerships occurred particularly in the area of service did not mean that service always brought churches together. Instead, it was at times a source of competition and tension. For example, members of Amor y Paz discussed the robust service programs at a local Catholic church as a huge draw to the parish. As one said, “los recién llegados necesitan ropa y comida y [esa iglesia católica] se los da” (the recent arrivals need food and clothing and this local Catholic church gives it to them). They said that the church required people to have proof that they went to mass in order to receive food, so when the members of Amor y Paz did outreach to promote their Food Pantry they clarified that there was no obligation to come to services. In this case, rather than being a force to bring together churches with different levels of resource access, service was a point of competition and division between churches.

General Inter-Church Relationships
Beyond partnerships focused on specific issues or projects, a number of churches allied with others simply for the sake of broader relationships of support. These alliances often happened within denominations and mainly at a leadership level. Because of how denominations created alliances, they sometimes contributed to the sectarianism of the churches. Casa de Jesús, for example, was part of the Assemblies of God denomination, which held local monthly meetings to talk about church issues and offer support to each other. Through these partnerships, the pastor of Casa de Jesús knew leaders of both Anglo and immigrant churches. However, these partnerships did not extend beyond a leadership level. Silvia at Casa de Jesús criticized the lack of relations because she said that leadership claimed the churches were partnered with each other but “Si fuéramos conectados, tendríamos convivencias con otras iglesias” (If we were connected, we would have events with other churches). For the small and recently started Iglesia de Esperanza, the leadership support of pastors in Argentina and the Assemblies of God meetings helped the church in their spiritual mission and to hold activities for which they would not otherwise have the resources. The pastor gave me an example of a prayer vigil where other churches provided them with musicians because Iglesia de Esperanza did not have anyone with formal musical talent.

At the participant level, relations with other churches sometimes occurred because people attend more than one church. This phenomenon was not uncommon among Catholic parishioners but only one member of a Protestant church expressed a similar activity. He attended the weekly prayer group meetings at Casa de Jesús but on Sundays went to a Mennonite church. For the Catholics, since mass is largely similar in any church they sometimes attended mass on Sundays at one place but identified another parish as their home church. As one at Reina de Paz explained, “Esta iglesia es mi principal pero voy a otras a veces” (This church is my main one
but I go to others at times). For example, a woman who lived in the suburbs sometimes went to English mass at the parishes by her house, but said that *Reina de Paz* was her primary parish and “no he pensado cambiar de parroquia” (I haven’t thought to change parishes). Similarly, some women who I interviewed attended *Cristo Rey* for Sunday services but considered *Reina de Paz* to be their main church. Cross-church attendance created a potential for linking activity, but because of the lack of bonding activity at mass, this potential was often underexploited.

**Protestant and Catholic Relations**

The glaring barrier to linking activity between churches in this study was the tension between Protestants and Catholics in the Latino community. Criticism of one group by the other was blatant and persistent. Many tensions originated in Latin America and were worse there. The Catholic Church has had historical power and political influence in the region while evangelical churches are fast growing in appeal and membership, which creates a competitive religious atmosphere (Sigmund 1999). Silvia at *Casa de Jesús* gave an example of when the pastor of *Casa de Jesús* was stoned out of a Catholic town in El Salvador because townspeople were so hostile toward evangelicals.

This conflict influenced church member and leader attitudes in the United States. In sermons at *Casa de Jesús* the pastor accused Catholics of praying before idols because they did not want to discover themselves in front of God. The pastor of *Iglesia de Esperanza* said that he became a Protestant because he realized that the Catholic religion was a lie. Protestants were particularly concerned by Catholic beliefs on saints and their perception that Catholics did not have a relationship with God. A number of Protestants brought up their opinions on the Catholic Church when they described converting away from Catholicism. Mariana at *Amor y Paz* mentioned that she converted in part because the “pastor said that there is no church that is
saved, just your relationship with God.” Protestants were very experiential in their worship and the leader of *Iglesia de Esperanza* said “Jamás tuve una experiencia con Dios en la católica” (I never had an experience of God in the Catholic Church).

At the same time, Catholics were often critical or suspicious of Protestants. The pastor of *St Anthony’s* said that Protestants could become “too centered on us and our music as praise, which can supplant the spirit of worship.” He said that many Latinos were converting to Protestantism because the Protestants had convincing arguments to persuade people who had never been educated to defend their faith. One woman at *Reina de Paz* said that when she first arrived in the US she ended up at a Presbyterian church and became very upset because “no había ningún Cristo en la iglesia” (there was not any Christ in the church), meaning that there was not any image of Christ on the cross in the church. She said, “Grité ‘Este no es mi iglesia!’” (I yelled “This isn’t my church!”). The cultural pressure toward Catholicism also made relations difficult. As Mariana at *Amor y Paz* explained, “I felt that if I went to Baptist church I was a traitor to my family.”

Latino Protestants and Catholics in this study were not always in direct opposition. Silvia from *Casa de Jesús* acknowledged that evangelicals had a lot to learn from Catholics in terms of service activities. A focus group from *Amor y Paz* pointed out the many improvements that the Catholic Church has made in recent years in terms of promoting community and Biblical knowledge. One woman even said “No me arrepiento de haber sido católica” (I don’t regret having been Catholic). The Food Pantry was a vehicle of church outreach at *Amor y Paz*, but when one volunteer asked a woman who came in whether she went to church and she said she went to Catholic Church he simply said “no importa que seas cristiana o católica, lo importante es de buscar a Dios” (It doesn’t matter whether you are Christian [Protestant] or Catholic, what is
important is to search after God). These signs of openness were encouraging but ultimately sparse in the face of many interviews that demonstrated extreme tension between the two groups.

These tensions between Catholic and Protestant churches in my research were a significant barrier to partnership and linking activity. As previously stated, Catholic churches often had more resource access and were more able to implement service activities. The two groups reached different populations and if they were able to overcome their sectarianism they would be able to better partner to promote social change. However, overcoming this barrier was difficult particularly for those who emphasize social change via spiritual renewal because they believed that the specific church doctrine was critically important and should not be compromised for any other cause.

5.2 Church Unity

Linking activity in this study did not always occur outside of the church. Latino communities located within larger churches that included Anglo communities often had linking potential within their church. Cristo Rey also had Vietnamese and Haitian immigrant communities that were linked through church unity efforts. Foley acknowledges the difficulty of such relations in terms of the tensions that they generate but says, “Still, the tie provides certain resources to the immigrant community, or it would not last long” (Foley 2007:110). Levitt agrees that the more contact between foreign-born communities and native host churches the more immigrants learned and the more tools they have at their disposal (Levitt 2008). Beyond the resources gained by this contact, Foley points out that “it also provides a setting in which the problems of incorporation may be fought out, if rarely to everyone’s satisfaction. Though such battles may exacerbate divisions and sharpen prejudices, they also demand engagement” (Foley
2007:110). Because of these varying levels of tensions, it is important to acknowledge the context of reception of Latino immigrants in churches, which I explained earlier in the summary of scholarly literature on religious reception. Initially, Latinos were pressured to assimilate into US Catholicism (Haddad 2003) though more recently churches have been more conscious of power dynamics within the congregation and have made efforts to promote unity. My research revealed both the tension that Foley discusses and the potential that these relationships generated since they allowed for linking activity and exchange of resources. Church members and leaders generally expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of unity in their churches, though some churches were more problematic than others and a number of leaders and churchgoers offered creative ideas on how to better promote unity.

**Attitudes toward Unity**

Many, though not all, of those interviewed emphasized the importance of church unity because of a shared faith. As Anabel at *St Anthony’s* said, “Queremos estar unidos como la iglesia Cristiana” (We want to be united as the Christian church). An Anglo leader at *Cristo Rey* said that actively promoting unity had to be a part of the church mission. As he explained, “the church needs to get people to interact who don’t normally talk to each other.” He said that this kind of linking activity would bear fruit because it would help meet the needs of all communities within the church. While this view was a majority opinion in the church, the priest at *Reina de Paz* was hesitant about pressuring people too much toward unity. He had only recently started an English mass at the parish and said, “I want a low-key group and I do not want to push them to do many things.” He did say he valued unity but did not see the present moment as the time for such an effort. The priest at *St Anthony’s* was the only interviewee who did not think that church unity should be a primary concern. As he said, “Having two separate churches doesn’t really
bother me” because “the lawyer wouldn’t be hanging out with the painter anyway.” He disagreed with the idea expressed elsewhere that the church should be promoting interaction between different groups of people. His view indicated deeper issues behind the divisions at St. Anthony’s, which will be discussed shortly. Besides that priest, everyone interviewed expressed a desire for greater unity.

Some church members, particularly at Reina de Paz, thought that the church was well-united. In general, the first reaction of people in interviews was to emphasize that there were cordial relations between the two communities. For example, parishioners at St Anthony’s always mentioned that the church did interact as a community at the parish picnic. However, upon deeper exploration most were dissatisfied by the level of unity in their churches. Anabel at St Anthony’s said that only about 20% of the Latino community came to the picnic because “nos gusta comer” (we like to eat) but they didn’t feel that events were really for the Latino community and they didn’t attend the festival, which was the only other main gathering event. Cristo Rey had the most programming to promote unity between these communities and made it an active goal of the parish. As the priest said, his mission for the church was “one heart, one church, one faith, one family.” For example, they had tasks such as writing on hands to encourage people to interact in between services and projects where parishioners cleaned the park or distribute leaflets together. They also had a specific parish unity committee that worked to address parishioner issues across the different communities. Even as they combined events across the different language communities, one Anglo leader explained that there was resistance because people still wanted “our picnic.” Amor y Paz was the only Protestant church in the study that had Latino and Anglo populations because it was founded with the model that a single church should have multiple language congregations. However, an Anglo leader of the Food
Pantry mentioned that although the idea in theory was valuable, there was “not as much mixing as I would like to see.”

While most regrets about a lack of church unity came from an incomplete realization of unity, at St Anthony’s several structural problems seemed to prevent unity. For example, the church only printed the bulletin in English. Anabel had asked to print the bulletin in Spanish, but the priest said that it is not worth the effort and, as she said, “no le da importancia a eso” (he doesn’t think it is important). She said that only herself and one other person read the bulletin because most of the Latino population thought that since it was in English it did not apply to them. Maria, another leader at St Anthony’s, also mentioned that the priest rarely spent time with the Latino community and that he did not ask for Latino support in programming. She said that she would be willing to help with anything but “Father … is more inclined to call upon people he know can lead well,” which meant people from the Anglo community because he knows them. Another member of the church thought the underlying issue was that “no se ha rompido la barrera que se crea en que somos dos culturas diferentes” (the barrier that is created in that we are two different cultures has not been broken). He thought that church members should not seem themselves as from different cultures but “no todos pensamos lo mismo” (we don’t all think the same) and many church members emphasized differences between Latinos and Anglos.

As previously mentioned, even a Latino leader in the diocese pointed out the discrimination at St Anthony’s that divided the church and devalued Latino parishioners. Anglo leaders at St Anthony’s seemed unaware of these resentments and again emphasized the cordiality of relations between the English and Spanish speaking populations. They thought that unity would come eventually as Spanish-speakers started to learn English.
Each of the churches that host both Anglo and Latino populations could more effectively promote church unity and therefore linking activity. For some churches that meant continuing the process of unity that had already begun. For others, most notably St Anthony’s, it meant confronting practices and structures that entrenched divisions.

Ways of Promoting Unity

Along with expressing different attitudes about church unity and the extent of its realization, many leaders and church members gave examples of different ways to promote this linking activity within the church. This linking primarily occurred through joint activities, because they provided opportunities for interaction in a structured way. As a brother at Crísto Rey explained, “We don’t need to change people to bring them together, just give opportunities.” An Anglo leader at Amor y Paz pointed to the points of contact such as the Food Pantry, Vacation Bible School, and their Easter event as ways that Latinos have come to know Anglos at the church. Crísto Rey had various events that intentionally promoted unity, such as cleaning the nearby park together or forming mixed race groups to hand out invitations to Easter services. All of these events were spaces where linking activity could and did occur.

Crísto Rey had the most intentional efforts to bring about parish unity, including a parish unity committee that was effective at promoting greater unity. According to the pastor, this committee was the first time that members of different language congregations had a space to plan and work together. The ESL program also helped unity at Crísto Rey because it promoted interaction between teachers, who were often from the English-speaking community, and students, who were often from the Spanish-speaking community. In general, a number of church leaders said that better communication was necessary for unity and said that the language barrier was a large reason for church division. One woman suggested Spanish classes for English
speakers to further improve relations. Although their efforts were incomplete, churches did create some spaces for linking activity, which benefited the community and their social change work.

**Resources and Programs Related to Linking**

Linking activity was valuable because it helped Latino communities acquire more resources. Many social scientists view this acquisition of resources for the purpose of personal advancement and integration into society. That is, whether this linking activity helps church members through the upward mobility of new jobs and connections (e.g. Ong 2003) For the purpose of this thesis, linking activity was more relevant in how church communities in general obtained these resources to promote their mission of social change. These resources were especially critical to churches’ involvement in the social change mechanism of material assistance. As Foley explained and as was discussed in the bridging activity chapter, churches with more resources tend to have more social programs (Foley 2007). Many churches had resources acquired by linking, but many churches could have more developed material assistance programs if they had more resources.

The largest benefit of resource access was to finance material assistance. The social outreach program at *St. Anthony’s*, which provided material support to people in the neighborhood, was funded through a poor box. Anabel, a leader of Hispanic ministry there, said that the donations mostly came from Anglos and “hay mucha gente muy generosa que dan 100 dólares a la semana” (there are many very generous people who give 100 dollars a week). They occasionally received larger donations and they also dedicated their Thanksgiving collection to support the poor box. All of these funds allowed them to meet most of the needs of people who sought assistance at the church. Similarly, donations from the Anglo community at *Amor y Paz*
and from other churches in the neighborhood generally support their Food Pantry. As its budget expanded, the Pantry served more families and gave each family more food than they previously could. The third church with an Anglo community, *Cristo Rey*, described similar economic support. The priest explained that the young Anglos at the church were creative in how they have fundraised for the social service programs, including an opportunity to donate through buying items on Amazon, which was convenient for busy young professionals.

In a number of instances in my research, it seemed that the Anglo community gave tangible resources, such as finances, to support programs, while the less tangible contributions of the Latino community were underappreciated. This disparity was important because it could affect how Latinos received the resources. Mooney found in her research of Haitian Catholics that congregants who felt like they were contributing to the community, if even in intangible ways, accepted more material help because they felt that their relationship with the church was one of dignity where they gave and did not just receive (Mooney 2009). This same sense of reciprocity did not always exist at the churches in my study, particularly at *St Anthony’s*. When Anabel described the resources that the Anglo community provided, she said of the Latino community “solamente recibimos” (we just receive). Maria, another Latina leader at the church, said that the Latino community was ready to serve in any way, but the pastor did not call upon them. These sentiments contrast with *Cristo Rey*, which had a Latino majority and where Latinos felt a sense of ownership as they supported programs with their time and talents even if they did not have the same level of economic resources as the Anglo community. Since I did not fully consider this issue in my interviews, I have insufficient evidence to fully develop this question, but it could be a direction for future research. In general, it seemed that churches should not
view linking activity only as a way to support the Latino community but rather an avenue for the communities to exchange different kinds of resources.

While many churches had obtained resources by linking, a number of church members explained specific ways in which they would be able to better promote social change if they had more resources. Mariana at Amor y Paz spoke about the fact that their social outreach program had no budget for the new ideas such as starting an after-school program that teaches literacy through reading the Bible or a parenting class for the community. Through these two ideas, they could engage in three of the mechanisms of social change (material assistance, spiritual renewal, and ministry to families), but they did not have the resources to begin them. A woman at St. Anthony’s also addressed the potential for resources to better support family life when she gave the example of a woman who arrived in church that Sunday with a problem with domestic violence. She said that it was difficult for women in that situation to connect to the church and pointed out “fuera bueno de tener un lugar donde pueden ir la gente para recibir ayuda” (it would be good to have a place where people could go to receive help). However, that service would require the church to dedicate resources and provide space. The Latino communities at these churches were not simply idealistic in their desire for more resources but rather had concrete ideas of how these resources could be channeled to change society. This foresight created a great potential for further church involvement, if churches could effectively take advantage of opportunities to link either within the community or to other churches.

5.3 Reaching Higher and Broader: Political Activity

Interviewees frequently mentioned political activity as a way of linking activity but it was also one of the more difficult for immigrant congregations to implement. When discussing ways
of social change, church members largely agreed that churches had a role in political activity through advocating in specific issue areas, as I explained in my section on political activity in the ways of social change chapter. In my study, some of the Latino churches were active in political issues in their local communities and to some extent encouraged general political participation such as registering to vote or learning about political issues. However, there were a number of barriers to Latino involvement, particularly the lack of opportunities and their immigration status.

**Involvement in Local Issues**

Consistent with the idea of churches primarily linking locally with other churches or within their church, the churches in my study also tended to be involved in linking activity in the political sense at a local scale. This emphasis on local involvement was not exclusive to Latino communities. In general, Rimmerman suggests that our ideas of citizenship need to extend beyond voting and encourage mobilization and community participation centered on local issues in neighborhood organizations (Rimmerman 1997). Communities where members cannot vote because of lack of citizenship could embrace this new conception of citizenship. Latinos mobilize and are politically involved, but most of that involvement is more informal and local, such as advocacy to stop an individual deportation (Ramirez 2007). In churches, Latino clergy are motivated by practical and local needs to support faith-based organizing (Espinosa 2005).

The churches in this study participated in political action as the literature suggests that they might. Although church members talked about the importance of advocacy in general political issues, their specific examples of involvement were in local and particular issues. *Cristo Rey* was the most notable example of local political involvement in part because of its location in a changing neighborhood and its church members’ presence in that neighborhood. The church
engaged in homeless advocacy for a number of reasons. First, the church provided material
social services for the homeless such as a dinner program and a hypothermia shelter in the
winter. Political advocacy on behalf of this population is a natural extension of their work. For
example, when the city planned to shut down the day shelter run by Catholic Charities that used
Sacred Heart’s space, an Anglo woman at the church spearheaded advocacy efforts to keep the
shelter open temporarily. She undertook this effort with a coalition of different organizations
including SHARC (Shelter, Housing, and Respectful Change), which was a homeless advocacy
group. She became involved with efforts because she volunteered at the dinner program at *Cristo
Rey*. Though this advocacy started in the Anglo community, people from across the language
congregations are now involved in the cause. The second reason for involvement, as previously
mentioned in the bridging chapter, was the homeless men who loiter at the park next to the
church. The proximity of these men to the church impelled the church to political action. In
particular, parents from a local charter school complained about the men in the park and thought
*Cristo Rey* was responsible for them. This complaint led to a meeting with the local
councilperson about the issue of the park and about housing and addiction in the neighborhood.

While these instances were positive examples of advocacy by both the Anglo and Latino
communities at *Cristo Rey*, this local issue was more complex than just advocating on behalf of
the men who spend time close to the church. Many church members were not comfortable with
their presence and, as one church leader said, “I can’t fault anyone for not wanting a drunk guy
in their face on the way to church.” As I mentioned in my chapter on bridging activity, some
former members of *Cristo Rey* who I interviewed at other parishes in this research mentioned
that they did not like the park next to that parish because of the men who “do drugs and bad
things.” Therefore, *Cristo Rey*’s political involvement on this local issue was not precisely
impassioned idealism. Rather, it was an attempt to mediate the needs of the neighborhood, church, and homeless men while staying true to the values of the church. Cristo Rey had a natural role because of its neighborhood situation and its service programs. This complexity and pragmatic negotiation of the church was in keeping with the nature of local political issues.

Cristo Rey provided an example of more extensive advocacy, but Amor y Paz and at one time Reina de Paz also both had some involvement in local or specific issues. At Amor y Paz, two of Mariana’s daughter’s friends were placed in deportation proceedings. The church prayed for them and then discovered the website Change.org where they developed a petition to ask for intervention to stop their deportation. Mariana’s daughter spearheaded efforts to advocate for them and collected signatures at the church. She also gathered support by linking to advocacy organizations in the area. Because of their efforts, the judge granted the two boys a two year stay of deportation. As Ana, another church member said, the petition made the church realize that they could have an impact in these political issues. This realization made her want to be more involved in political advocacy and she gave an example of another local issue of busing to a Christian after-school program as another possibility for church involvement, though Amor y Paz was not yet involved in that issue. Reina de Paz was no longer as politically involved, but one woman who had been at the church for many years explained that the domestic workers association that used to be at the church helped her advocate to defend her rights in some problems with her employers at the local embassies. In each of these cases, very specific local issues impelled churches’ political involvement and in the case of Amor y Paz this local involvement encouraged congregants to think of new ways to be involved politically.

Other Involvement: Elections and Education
Local involvement was a tangible way that churches were politically active and an obvious example of linking activity, because such involvement required contact with people in local positions of power. However, churches in this study also participated politically through encouraging members to vote or to campaign on particular issues. For example, in the months before the November, 2012 elections almost every Sunday the pastor at Casa de Jesús would mention the importance of voting against legalization of gay marriage in Maryland and for the Maryland DREAM Act. In both of these instances, they encouraged church members to obtain signs from the church and to vote. None of the other churches were as vocal or specific on political issues. However, churches in general encouraged their members to vote. Cristo Rey last June had a voter registration drive at their church festival and they also went door-to-door on two different occasions to register people to vote. Similarly, a leader in the diocese spoke about a local congressman who supported mobilization of Latino voters and held voter-empowerment meetings, which this leader attended even though he cannot be specifically politically involved because of his position. Unfortunately, this focus on voting as a major means of political involvement did not apply to many Latinos because of their immigration status, which I will discuss later. It was also problematic because it often did not translate into broader action. As one woman at St. Anthony’s explained to me, as a citizen she felt obliged to vote but she did not see herself being any more involved in politics. It is precisely this focus on citizenship as just voting that Rimmerman finds problematic, which is why he proposes a re-thinking of what citizenship means to include more involvement and activity (Rimmerman 1997). Perhaps there would be more political activity if citizenship were seen in the context of civic engagement and thus related to bridging activity.
Education was another way that churches developed political involvement and encouraged this linking activity. In particular, Mariana at *Amor y Paz* believed that good education in issues was fundamental for people to become involved in social change, particularly through material assistance or political involvement. She gave the examples AIDS or immigration education as ways to encourage congregant involvement in service to affected communities and provide church members with resources to serve effectively. She explained that her model for involvement was to first educate people and “after education, they can move out and serve.” I conducted this research in the fall after President Obama announced Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), which defers deportation and grants work permits to young immigrants who met certain eligibility requirements. Therefore, churches focused on DACA as a way of education in political involvement. Both *Amor y Paz* and *Casa de Jesús* had lawyers come to church and explain the requirements of DACA. This action benefited church members, but members at *Amor y Paz* thought it was also a way to serve the local community by connecting them to this opportunity for a type of work permit. In some ways, this education provided another way for the church to engage in bridging activity.

**Barriers to Political Involvement**

In spite of the examples of Latino church political involvement, of the four mechanisms of social change, churches in this study were least likely to be engaged in promoting political change. One of the major barriers to this participation was the lack of education on involvement or lack of opportunities to be involved. Individual political participation is directly related to contact and recruitment so Latinos participate when they are asked to be involved, but the issue with their participation is that they are rarely asked (Jones-Correa and Leal 2001). As Ana at *Amor y Paz* explained, “There is a lack of information on how to be involved. We just don’t
think that it is possible.” At times, this hesitancy toward involvement came from the perception that it is not the church members’ place to be involved in political issues. One member of Reina de Paz explained that the bishops have spoken out actively on a number of issues, including in support of migrants. She thought that it was the place of the clergy to work on political issues because “yo no conozco de eso” (I don’t know of these things). This perception of division of responsibility limits the involvement of lay people in the political sphere, as I discussed in the section on leadership in the bonding activity chapter. Moreover, avenues for involvement are limited because people who move more often are less likely to be politically involved since they do not have a consistent place to be invested (Ramirez 2007). This observation on mobility affected many of the churches in my study because, as I mentioned in my bridging activity chapter, many church members had moved out of the local area and therefore did not have the contact points for involvement or the incentive to be involved in local issues. Therefore, there were issues in both church structure and in neighborhood involvement that limited the channels through which Latinos in this study became politically active.

Perhaps the most important barrier to political involvement for many congregants was immigration status. Some church members mentioned status as a limiting factor because it prevented church members from voting. For example, a woman at St. Anthony’s said that since only about 30% of the parish can vote, “hay poquitas personas que se interesan en la política” (there are few people who are interested in politics). Ana at Amor y Paz explained that obtaining US citizenship was a difficult decision because it felt like a betrayal of her homeland. As an Argentinean, she would have to give up her citizenship to become a US citizen and it seemed to her like giving up her family or giving up on her country. Of course, as the preceding analysis shows, there were ways to be politically involved besides citizenship and voting. However, as
one woman pointed out, many Latinos feared that if they were too politically vocal they would be deported, especially if they did not have papers. There was also the cultural limitation that Latinos were not used to speaking out because as Ana mentioned, “nuestro país no nos da oportunidades” (our country doesn’t give us opportunities). So Latinos were more timid about speaking out since they were not empowered by opportunities in their home country. As one church member said, “los Latinos se sienten menos” (Latinos feel less important). While churches could overcome the barriers of citizenship by offering different options for involvement, it was harder for churches to address the barriers of political mentality.

In Summary

Linking activity was the most challenging of the three forms of activities explored in my research and in some ways seemed least relevant to the churches’ core focus. However, linking either through relations with other churches or unity within the church were good ways to obtain resources in order to carry out action in the different mechanisms of social change. Linking by being involved in political activity was critical because churches understood politics as an important mechanism of social change. In each of these categories, churches would need to create opportunities for the activity just as they did for bonding and bridging activity. Uniquely for linking activity, in order to empower Latino involvement churches should also consider issues of racism and power dynamics either within the church or in relation to broader society. Through addressing these barriers, churches might become more effective in engaging in society and promoting social change.
Chapter 6: Conclusions

The aim of this study was not to identify a single variable that facilitated greater involvement in a specific area of social change but rather to consider a broad vision of social change and a number of factors within churches that shaped their involvement in bringing about social change both at the local and national level. As Latinos become more visible politically and socially, the question is no longer simply how the US society can support them but also how immigrants can become agents of change in their communities and in the wider society. Through an exploration of how churches bond, bridge, and link, this study has identified ways in which churches have been effective in this engagement and also emphasized potential areas for improvement. Further research is needed to develop comprehensive understanding of how immigrants can be empowered as change agents in order to provide more precise programmatic suggestions and recommendations for churches.

Programmatic Ramifications

Regardless of which mechanisms of social change the churches emphasized, each community could expand their impact through more structured programs that facilitate involvement. Since members at all churches were inclined through involvement pressure to participate in church activity, churches can create structures to channel this tendency toward bridging and linking activities in order to more effectively implement their vision of social change. According to my study, the most effective structures seem to be those that can accommodate widespread participation in a social environment.

In order to create these structures, churches might also evaluate their leadership models to consider both the relation between clergy and laypeople and between Anglo and Latino congregants. Environments where leaders can emerge more easily can facilitate innovations in
church activity toward social change. At the same time, churches must consider whether their leaders are prepared and empowered to innovate in these ways or whether they are simply filling iterative positions. Some churches may need to think about the extent to which Latinos are contributing to programmatic leadership and if implicit discrimination exists in how programs are run or leaders are chosen.

In order to better mobilize resources to support church activity, Latino churches must give particular consideration to relations between Protestant and Catholic communities. Certain theological barriers might be insurmountable, but both faith communities can reflect on areas in which the two churches might partner together to promote social change. These churches have the greatest potential for partnership in the mechanisms of family values, material assistance, and political activity. Yet, with certain delicacy, partnership in supporting spiritual renewal might also be possible.

A final factor for consideration among these churches is their location and how to overcome the limitations of their neighborhoods. In particular, Latino churches located in relatively affluent or Anglo communities might reflect on how they can be involved in bridging activity to other neighborhoods or in unique ways to their own neighborhood. One possibility is creating structures of involvement in neighborhoods where many congregants live, which might require smaller prayer groups to create these structures since they will not be in the immediate geographical vicinity of the church. In that way, the fact that the need does not immediately surround the church will not inherently limit bridging activity and work toward social change.

**Directions for Future Research and Application**

In this small exploratory study it was impossible to cover the breadth of issues related to social change in Latino churches. From the church involvement perspective, future research
might consider whether Latinos who perceive that they are contributing more to the church are also more likely to use church services. Gender differences are also an important future consideration in analyzing church leadership and participation. Studies of leadership might also include a comparison between leadership opportunities in countries of origin and those in the US, both in general and in relation to gender.

From the political perspective, more research might be done to consider the relative importance of the social values and economic rights stances of the church. That is, as Latino church members become more politically involved it is important to consider the influence of both their socially conservative stances on issues such as gay marriage and their fiscally liberal attitudes in regards to poverty and immigration.

This research focused specifically on Latino churches, but future studies might consider whether the findings apply to other immigrant groups. In particular, as Latinos become more established in the United States, this study might have future application to understand how new non-Latino immigrant groups incorporate into religious life and engage in their own activity directed toward social change. This research is only a step in the ongoing process of understanding the relation of immigrant religious life and societal change.
References


