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# Todos las naciones, tribus, pueblos y lenguas: The Growing Need of Hispanic Protestant Churches in the United States

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Todos las naciones, tribus, pueblos y lenguas:  
The Growing Need of Hispanic Protestant Churches in the  
United States

An Honors Thesis

Presented to

The University Honors Program

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By

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### **Abstract**

This thesis covers the growing movement of Protestantism amongst Hispanics in the United States. Although significant growth in this movement has occurred in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the roots of this movement come from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and started in Latin America. Today, more and more Hispanics are converting from Catholicism to Protestantism. Furthermore, more Hispanics are immigrating to the United States and may struggle to find a sense of belonging in their new home due to language and cultural barriers. This is where Hispanic churches rise to the occasion as they provide a place in which Hispanics can connect with others of similar cultures and speak the same language. With more immigrants coming in and the projected growth of Hispanics and the number of Spanish speakers in the United States, it is crucial that more churches are made. One might ask why, as churches are often thought of as only being used for religious purposes. Instead, Hispanic Protestant churches benefit immigrants by providing a community and other essential services that they may need to adjust to a new life and life in general. Some services include providing English classes, providing mental health support, and providing support for domestic abuse. The only way these churches can help Hispanics is if more of them are planted, which requires time, planning, and support from the local community and other churches for these new churches to come to life.

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## **Chapter 1: Hispanic Protestantism: A Movement and Community Builder**

### **1.1 Introduction**

The United States of America has often been described as a melting pot as it contains a comprehensive blend of cultures living together in a single nation. Even before its conception as a nation, America was a diverse land, first with its Indigenous populations, and each group had its customs, languages, and traditions. However, much of the United States' diversity can be attributed to the fact that this nation has become a beacon of light for immigrants and attracted many to move here throughout history to the present day. Some examples include pilgrim migration in the 1600s, the German and Chinese migration during the Industrialization era, westward expansion, and many others.

There is a collective of immigrants, however, that has made even greater waves in the United States than these previously stated groups. Furthermore, this group is unique from other migrations because although they come from various countries, each with its own customs, there is some common ground regarding language and cultural beliefs. Likewise, this immigrant group has significantly grown since the mid-twentieth century. According to the Pew Research Center, nearly 20 million immigrants lived in the United States in 2021 (Haner and Lopez). Who is this group that is shaping the United States? They are Hispanics.

Before moving forward, it is essential to note that there is often a misunderstanding about whether to refer to Spanish-speaking individuals from Latin America as either Latinos or Hispanics. For clarity, Latinos relate to people from Latin America, but that does not necessarily mean that they are Spanish speakers (e.g., Brazilians and Belizeans are Latinos, though they speak Portuguese and English, respectfully). Hispanics refer to any person from a Spanish-speaking country; likewise, it does not mean they are from Latin America (e.g., Spaniards are

considered Hispanics). Thus, since the subject matter of this thesis concerns Spanish speakers, they will be referred to as Hispanics; however, the focus is on Hispanics from Latin American countries.

Why are some immigrants coming in from Latin America? For many immigrants, they are seeking asylum from either political upheaval or violence within their home countries. According to the Congressional Research Service, violence and homicide rates have increased dramatically in Central America as nations such as El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras are being plagued by drug traffickers. These traffickers and gangs, including Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13), the 18th Street gang, and others, fight with competing traffickers to gain more territory for more drug routes, distribution, and exhortation. The situation in these nations has gotten so out of hand that it has led to thousands of innocent citizens being displaced within these nations. In 2018, El Salvador reported that 71,500 of its citizens were displaced due to violence. The Honduran government, likewise, reported that 247,000 of its citizens were displaced (*Central American Migration: Root Causes and U.S. Policy*).

If the government knows that this gang violence is occurring, one might ask, why are they not doing anything to stop it? Is it not the duty of any government to protect and serve the best interests of its people? While the governments of places such as Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador are aware of this crisis, these drug traffickers and gangs have so much power that they can either influence government officials or intimidate them so that no action can be taken against them. With an ineffective government and endless violence, many citizens feel they have no choice but to escape their homelands and come to the United States, where it is much safer (*Central*).

Meaningless violence is not the only factor contributing to Latin American immigrants coming to the United States. The lack of job opportunities and/or better-paying jobs in the United States has led many immigrants to pursue a new life there. Likewise, there appear to be even fewer jobs in the immediate future as a large percentage of the population is under twenty, which means more people will be able to repopulate. Food insecurity is another factor forcing immigrants out of their homelands. Once again, going back to Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, also known as the Northern Triangle, have seen some of the most significant increases in food insecurity. In 2019, 2.2 million citizens of these three countries faced food insecurity. Two years later, that number increased to 6.6 million citizens who did not know where their next meal was coming from. In 2023, food insecurity decreased slightly, but still, 5.5 million Hondurans and Guatemalans faced insecurity (*Central*).

### **1.2 Trials, Isolation, and the Need for Church**

Immigrating to a new country is no simple task, not only for Hispanics but immigrants in general. Not only is the travel to a new country difficult, but there are also many other obstacles that others tend to forget. Such “neglected” obstacles that arise are language barriers and culture shock. Language prevents many migrants from receiving the support they need, such as advisors or medical care, as many of these systems only work in the native language of the country. These critical support systems do not have or have minimal resources to translate these services into the language of migrants. Such is the case in the United States with Hispanic migrants.

Before delving into how the United States lacks in terms of language support for Hispanics, it is essential to discuss the English proficiency of these migrants. Language barriers are not a factor for some immigrants because they are fluent in English, so the previously stated



support system flaws do not apply. How many Hispanic immigrants are proficient in English and thus not restricted (or at least through language) to various support systems? This is the question that the Pew Research Center decided to investigate in 2016. Based on government data, they found that only twenty-five percent of undocumented immigrants from Mexico were proficient in English. The Pew Research Center also found a similar percentage of English competence in undocumented immigrants from the Northern Triangle, with twenty-two percent proficiency. The Northern Triangle area includes El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala. Lastly, other parts of Latin America had the highest percentage of English proficiency, with forty-three percent of undocumented immigrants being proficient (Passel and Cohn).

Why is this English proficiency a problem? Can immigrants use their native language to “get by”? The problem is that English proficiency is necessary for everything, as the United States is a predominantly monolingual nation. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 78.3 percent of the population only speaks English (US Census Bureau). Thus, there is a disconnect between citizens of the United States and new incomers to the nation. The language barrier hinders much-needed support and creates a feeling of isolation. This feeling of isolation for Hispanics is especially prevalent in rural areas of the United States, in which predominantly first-generation immigrants and second-generation children live. In a study conducted in rural areas of North Carolina, Hispanic adolescents reported experiencing “a hostile environment due to limited English proficiency, feelings of rejection, a sense of limited future, institutional racism, and devalued Latino/an identity (Fanfan et al.).” Likewise, in Hispanic culture, there is a strong emphasis on family values, or *familismo*, which others outside the culture may perceive as archaic and “resulting in conflict with and isolation from other social contexts such as school or neighborhoods (Fanfan et al.).”

This isolation is detrimental to the well-being of Hispanic immigrants and prevents them from achieving their full potential, according to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. To reach one's full potential, according to Maslow, one must have physiological (food, water, shelter), safety, belonging, love, and esteem needs to be fulfilled to reach self-actualization (McLeod). With a feeling of isolation due to language and culture barriers, Hispanic immigrants' needs of belonging and love cannot be (or entirely) fulfilled. Thus, esteem and self-actualization can neither be reached. The question remains: how can one eliminate these feelings of isolation so that Hispanic immigrants and their children can live their best lives? Isolation comes from a lack of belonging, so the solution would come from a place where immigrants feel like they belong- a community. Likewise, this community would need to be able to provide support so that migrants can adjust and thrive in their new home. What is this community? The answer is found in bilingual or Hispanic protestant churches.

### **1.3 Why Protestant Churches?**

One might ask why churches? Why are protestant churches specifically needed? Why not Catholic churches? To answer the first question of why churches, church, and religion play a significant role in Hispanic culture. The importance of religion for Hispanics is discussed in a survey conducted for the academic journal *Ethnicity & Disease*. The survey observed the religiosity of different race and ethnicity groups, asking questions such as "How often do you go to church?" "How often do you pray?" For the first question, "How often do you go to church?" Forty-three percent of Hispanics responded every week, and twenty-three percent responded once or twice a month. To the question, "How important are your religious or spiritual beliefs for what you do every day?" Sixty-eight percent of Hispanics responded that their religious beliefs

were fundamental, and twenty-one percent stated it was fairly important (Franzini et al.). Thus, a place that already has a significant role in Hispanic culture should play a part in helping create a community. Furthermore, churches can bring people together with worship services and different events such as lunches/dinners, parties, and much more.

The question that remains is why the need for more Hispanic Protestant churches exists. Are not a large percentage of Hispanics Catholic? While it is true that Catholicism has and continues to play a significant role as it is the religion that the Spanish brought to the Americas, there has been a growing movement of Hispanics converting from the old religion to Protestantism since the mid-1900s and has no signs of stopping. To understand the current movement of Hispanics converting to Protestantism, it is essential to look at the past.

#### **1.4 History of the Protestant Movement Amongst Hispanics**

The flames of Protestantism conversion amongst Hispanics were not fanned overnight. This movement began over a century ago after the Spanish-American War in 1898. With the United States' victory over the Spanish, the US acquired several of Spain's territories- Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines. These new territories were of some proximity to the US and now opened for American citizens to open the gates for Protestant missionaries seeking to evangelize to Latinos. The impact of these missionaries' work would later be evident in the 20<sup>th</sup> century when many migrants from these territories were already Protestant (Martínez 54).

Continuing into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Hispanic Protestantism movement continued to grow thanks to two major conflicts: the Mexican Revolution in 1910 and the First World War that started in 1914. With its violence and social upheaval, the Mexican Revolution would cause many people to flee to the United States for security. Likewise, with a majority of the workforce

gone during the First World War, the United States needed people to fill in the vacancies. Thus, a large wave of immigrants from Mexico began to settle in the Southwestern parts of the States (Martínez 56). Seeing this large influx of people and the need to evangelize and provide support, many Protestant churches began to develop missions and churches in these areas.

From Presbyterians to Methodists to Baptists, there was not just one Protestant group ministering to the immigrants in their new homes. For example, there were the Baptists whose efforts would give rise to the Convención Bautista Mexicana de Texas (Mexican Baptist Convention of Texas) in 1910. This convention would collaborate with other Baptist churches to create even more churches for Spanish-speaking congregations and would also create training institutions for Spanish-speaking pastors in 1925, called the Mexican Bible Institute (Martínez 60).

The Seventh Day Adventists would also play an important role in developing Hispanic churches in the United States as well. Like the Baptists, the Seventh-Day Adventists wanted to train Hispanic pastors to reach the Spanish-speaking community. In 1920, the denomination would start a school to train Latino pastors. With financial restrictions, however, this school would not survive but would later serve as a basis for the Hispanic American Seminary in 1945. The Seventh Day Adventists provided immigrants a church home and education for their children with Spanish-speaking primary and second schools (Martínez 60).

The progress made by Spanish-speaking Protestants in the United States in the first few decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century would be shattered by the Great Depression. With high unemployment combined with racism, the US government forced many Hispanic immigrants as well as Hispanic American citizens out of the country in cruel methods, such as in rail cars with little or no access to food and water. This mass deportation was detrimental to Spanish-speaking

churches in the US as many pastors, church leaders, and congregants were kicked out. During this time, the denomination, the Assemblies of God, reported losing over one hundred Spanish-speaking churches. Other denominations would report similar outcomes (Martínez 69).

Following the Second World War, however, the emigration from Latin American nations to the United States would be on the rise again. As stated above, the numerous conflicts within Latin American countries and the lack of better employment opportunities can be accredited to the many people moving to the United States. With the rise of immigration into the United States, the Hispanic Protestant movement began to grow once more. Despite the growth of Protestantism amongst Hispanics, it remained a minority. In research conducted in the 1960s for the book *The Mexican American People: The Nation's Second Largest Minority*, the authors discovered that only three percent of the Mexican American population in all of the United States professed to be Protestant (Martínez 85). It is essential to note the limitations of this research as it only observed Mexican Americans and did not observe Hispanic groups such as Cuban Americans, Ecuadorian Americans, etc. During this time, however, Mexican Americans were the most prominent Hispanic group within the United States, comprising 4,013,900 of the 5,645,900 Hispanic Americans (Gregory). Thus, Mexican Americans could be considered a significant representative of the Hispanic Protestant movement.

### **1.5 Hispanic Protestant Movement in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

If Protestantism was such a slight majority in the 60s, the question remains as to why there is a need to create more Protestant churches. Although the work of Protestants may not have shown much fruit during the 20th century, their work appears to bear fruit in the 21st century. In 2022, the Pew Research Center reported that twenty-one percent of Hispanics living

in the United States reported being Protestant, and only forty-three percent are Catholic.

Compare this to over a decade before, in 2010, in which only seventeen percent of Hispanics reported being Protestant and sixty-seven percent being Catholic) (Krogstad et al.). That is a six-point growth percentage within a little over a decade and an eighteen-point growth percentage from the 1960s. If this considerable growth occurs within a decade and steady growth after several decades, it can be assumed that the Hispanic Protestant movement in the United States will continue to grow.

The growth of Protestantism amongst Hispanics in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is limited to the number of congregants and the churches themselves. According to Lifeway Research, a majority of Hispanic Protestant churches are in the new millennium, with fifty-four percent being formed since 2000 and thirty-two percent of that overall percentage being formed in 2010 or later. Immigrants play a major role in developing Hispanic Protestant churches within the US, as fifty-eight percent of these church members are first-generation, and twenty-four percent are second-generation (Earls).

Indeed, the Protestant movements from the 20<sup>th</sup> century played a role in this massive conversion movement, but are there other factors for this movement, especially with the large size of the new century? Is there something about Protestantism specifically that is attracting this large group of people? Once again, these are some of the questions that the Pew Research Center wanted answered in their 2013 study of Hispanics and religion. What researchers discovered is that fifty-seven percent of former Catholics turned Protestants said that they converted because they no longer believed in the teachings of the Catholic church. Some of these teachings include but are not limited to, the Virgin Mary and the saints acting as intercessors for prayer. Likewise, some converts stated a lack of confidence in Catholic priests (especially with the more recent

reports of the sex abuse scandals). Furthermore, Catholic-turned-Protestants also felt that Protestant churches “reach out and help its members more (Pew Research Center).” With more and more Hispanics converting to Protestantism, the growing need for Hispanic Protestant churches also grows.

## **Chapter 2: The Continuing Need for More Churches**

### **2.1 The Current State of Hispanic Protestant Churches in the United States**

With the fast-growing movement of Protestantism amongst Hispanics throughout, one must also look at the state of Hispanic Protestant churches in the United States. Where are these churches located? There may be parts of the United States in which there are few to no Hispanic Protestant churches, thus denying Hispanic Protestants a place of worship as well as a sense of community. Surely, Hispanic Protestants can attend non-Hispanic churches as well, but recall that a large percentage of Hispanic immigrants only speak Spanish, and a majority of people in the United States only speak English. Once again, this language barrier could create a potential disconnect between immigrants and their fellow congregants and develop a sense of isolation. Therefore, a better comprehension of the present state of these churches allows for a reflection on what needs to change for the future.

### **2.2 Location of Hispanic Churches**

That is the question that Lifeway Research, the Samaritan’s Purse, and the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association wanted to answer in their collaborative research study. In this study, these Christian organizations partnered with over two dozen denominations and other church organizations to survey 692 pastors whose congregations were at least fifty percent Hispanic. According to this survey, fifty percent of Hispanic Protestant churches are in cities with 100,000

people or more (the study called large cities). Following large cities, thirty-one percent of these churches were found in small cities (with a population of less than 100,000). Lastly, nine and eight percent of Hispanic Protestant churches were respectfully located in rural and suburban areas (Earls).

The question remains how these percentages compare to the percentage of Hispanic Protestants living in those areas. In other words, are there enough churches for the respective population of potential congregants? For example, if nine percent of Hispanic Protestant churches are located in rural areas, nine percent of the total Hispanic Protestant population also lives in these rural areas. Or is there a more significant percentage of Hispanic Protestants residing in rural areas, in which nine percent is not sufficient to fit their needs? While it is difficult to determine the exact number of Hispanic Protestants living in these different areas, based on the general population of Hispanics to the ratio of these churches, it appears that there is a sufficient number of churches for the number of Hispanics in most of these areas, yet not all.

In 2021, the Census Bureau reported that 62.6 million people (or 18.9 percent of the total population) in the United States were Hispanic (US Census Bureau, “Hispanic Heritage Month 2022”). Of that total population, over 27.7 million people lived in America’s largest cities, such as Los Angeles, New York, Miami, Houston, Riverside, California, Dallas, Chicago, Phoenix, San Antonio, and San Diego (Pew Research Center, “Top 10 U.S. Metropolitan Areas by Hispanic Population, 2021”). Although it does not cover all large cities, based on this information, forty-four percent of the total Hispanic population lived in large cities. This percentage of Hispanics is less than the ratio of churches in large cities. Thus, the 50 percent of Hispanic Protestant churches in these cities should be more than sufficient. This sufficiency is



even more true when considering the fact that not every Hispanic is Protestant, and the majority of Hispanics are still Catholic.

Similar issues have arisen in suburban areas or those located outside these large cities. In the 2020 Census, Hispanics comprised 20.2 percent of the suburban population (Frey). In this case, the 8 percent of Hispanic Protestant churches in these areas do not fulfill the need, and in fact, there is a significant deficiency between the two ratios. Once again, one must take into consideration that not every Hispanic will be Protestant, but this large gap is somewhat concerning.

While the information for Hispanics living in small cities could not be attained, there is a great deal of information regarding Hispanics residing in rural areas. Hispanic immigrants and Americans are contributing a large part to rural growth. In a 2020 Population Research and Policy Review study, researchers found that Hispanics contributed to sixty-three percent of all rural population gains from 2000 to 2010 (Lichter and Johnson 786). Likewise, in a more extended study from 1990 to 2017, these researchers also found that sixty percent of rural growth can be attributed to Hispanics, especially immigrants. To observe more specifically, each year within this time frame, there was a population growth of roughly 150,000 people, and Hispanics contributed 85,000. As of the 2020 Census, Hispanics made up 4.1 million of the rural population, making them not only the largest minority group in rural areas but also nine percent of the total population (Johnson and Licther). This population ratio is equivalent to the percentage of churches in rural areas, but this growth reveals another issue.

### **2.3 Grow or Die**

While the overall ratio of church percentage to Hispanic population percentage in certain areas may be suitable for now (except for the suburban area), that does not mean that the growth of more Hispanic Protestant Churches can stagnate. The need for more Hispanic Protestant churches still needs to grow as the United States pushes deeper into the twenty-first century. By 2060, it is projected that 26.9 percent of people in the United States will be Hispanic, or roughly 1 in 4 Americans (Flores). However, having more Hispanic Americans in the United States does not signify that the Spanish language will also increase. Not all Hispanics speak Spanish, and many Hispanics can only speak English.

Despite this, the Spanish language is still credited to be on the rise as well. Currently, 13 percent of the United States population speaks Spanish (this includes bilingual speakers). As of 2050, it is projected that 1 in 3 Americans will speak Spanish (Thompson). In short, the Spanish language and the diversity of Hispanic cultures in the United States will not disappear. Likewise, as stated above, Protestantism amongst Hispanics is also growing with no signs of stopping. Therefore, more Spanish-speaking Protestant churches are needed in the United States. The question remains: What parts of the United States are necessary for these churches? As stated above, there is a need in suburban areas as the Hispanic Protestant church percentage does not come close to the rate of Hispanics living in suburban areas. Are there other areas in which there will be a need for more Spanish-speaking Protestant churches in the future?

Future Hispanic churches should first look at rural areas. As stated previously, immigration, as well as mere repopulation, has been attributed to the growth in the Hispanic population in these rural areas. The current growth statistics in these rural areas are suitable for showing the present needs and can potentially reveal the projected growth. Once again, a closer inspection of these growth rates is needed. From 2012 to 2018, the percentage of Hispanics grew

about 1.8 percent annually. Similarly, from 2000 to 2017, the percentage of the rural population that identified as Hispanic increased significantly from 5.4 to 9 percent (Lichter and Johnson 786). These current growth rates range from less than a decade to almost two decades, and both show that the percentage of Hispanics in rural areas shows no signs of stopping. This evidence for future growth in rural areas is even further supported when looking at the younger generations of Hispanics in a rural area. In a 2020 study, Hispanics represented 14 percent of the population under 18 in rural areas. This 14 percent is double the 7 percent of the population that was 18 and older (Johnson and Licther). With more people in the younger generation, there is more of an opportunity for the future percentages of Hispanics living in rural areas to grow.

Rural areas of the United States are not the only areas seeing growth in Hispanic populations. In 1990, the percentage of people living in suburban areas who identified as Hispanic was about 9 percent. Jump thirty years in 2020, and that percentage over doubled to 20.2 percent of the suburban population stating they were Hispanic. Large cities also reported growth in their Hispanic populations, albeit not as big of a difference. For large cities in the 1990s, Hispanics comprised 17.1 percent of the population. In 2020, however, that percentage increased to 27.1 percent (Frey). With the overall projected growth of Hispanics, it can safely be assumed that these areas of the United States will continue to grow in population as they already have within the last 30 years. Therefore, the number of Hispanic Protestant churches needs to grow as well.

## **Chapter 3: More than Just an Hour of Worship**

### **3.1 Breaking Down the Walls of Language**

One might scoff at the importance of more churches in the United States. One might think that a church is only a place of worship, and while it does provide a place of community, as stated previously, is there anything else that a church can do? What about the people who are not religious? Is a church any good to immigrants (or people in general) who may not practice any religion and or have nothing to do with the place? While it is true that churches' primary goal is to worship God, they still provide a lot of services and goods for free for a community in need. Some of the services include but are not limited to, providing meals for those in need and supplies for single moms and underprivileged students. The question remains: what services do churches provide specifically for immigrants and Hispanics?

To answer this question, it is crucial to observe some of the general issues that immigrants and Hispanics face in the United States today. The first is stated in the first chapter, the issue of language. To reiterate, the Pew Research Center found that only 22 to 43 percent of undocumented immigrants were proficient in English, meaning a majority of them were not. Even among lawful immigrants, even though a slight majority is proficient in English, there are still 43 percent who are not (Passel and Cohn). English proficiency is an even more significant problem for immigrant parents, as 54 percent of these parents have limited English skills (Chao and Mantero). As stated above, English proficiency is an absolute must for people wanting to live in the United States, as most Americans can only communicate in said language. So, how does the church address this situation of language barriers? Enter church-based English as a Second (ESL) programs. These programs open a door of opportunity for immigrants as they allow both parents and children access to English education. While the children of immigrants have access to ESL in their schools, the options of places for parents to learn English can be limited, if not nonexistent.

How do these church-based ESL programs function? Are such programs effective in teaching immigrants the English language? That is the question that researchers Xia Chao and Miguel Mantero wanted to answer in their research, “Church-Based ESL Adult Programs: Social Mediators for Empowering ‘Family Literacy Ecology of Communities’” in which they observed 11 immigrants (not only Latino but Asian as well) in two different church-based ESL programs. However, the immigrants were predominantly Hispanic, with six of the 11 coming from Mexico or Guatemala. The ESL programs took place on Wednesday nights for about an hour and a half. So that parents did not have to worry about what they would do with their children, the church provided church via a nursery and children’s ministry classes simultaneously (Chao and Mantero).

The core concepts of the English language were taught with an ESL book called *ESL Beginner*. This book taught learners English grammar in a manner that was easy to comprehend due to illustrations and simplified English. Not only did this program use *ESL Beginner* as a resource to teach immigrants English, but it also used magazines and flashcards with essential vocabulary words. The programs also taught important life skills and citizen knowledge, such as exchanging money, writing checks, government functions, and many others. Furthermore, the classes were instructed only in English (Chao and Mantero).

The practices of the ESL programs were not limited to a single night of the week at the church but included various events for members and their families to get involved with. Such activities include field trips or gatherings in other places where families can talk about their experiences and culture while using English. Not all the events and activities required learners to travel to a new place. Instead, some of these activities planned by the ESL program could occur in the learner’s home. For example, one of the activities these ESL programs give to immigrants

is some literary piece (e.g., newspaper, shared story) that encourages them to read with their children. This not only assists with the English literacy of the parents but also helps bring families together, as one parent states:

“I used to feel like kids and me living in two different worlds, my Spanish world and their English world. I know nothing about Halloween or Thanksgiving holidays. Kids learn these at school, but they cannot explain them to me in Spanish. I experienced these holidays in my ESL class. Now, I can share the things with them (Chao and Mantero).”

Another essential factor of this ESL program is that it did not devalue the parent’s original language. Instead, the ESL instructors encouraged using immigrants’ native language within the classroom by using certain practices or words in the native language. For example, the classroom room had Biblical verses written in Spanish placed on the wall. From an outsider’s perspective, this may not seem to carry a great deal of value, but to those in the ESL program, these small gestures went far in empowering the parents themselves as well as their native language. When asked about seeing Spanish written in the classroom, one of the students, who was an immigrant from Mexico, responded, “Good to see it written in Spanish because it is hard to see something here written in Spanish. It is precious to see something spelled in Spanish. I feel respected. When I got into the door, it was the first thing I saw, and I started reading it. I feel happy and excited (Chao and Mantero).”

### **3.2 The Church and Domestic Abuse Support**

While crucial, ESL programs are not the only services churches can provide to the Hispanic community. Churches can also serve as a domestic violence support system or as a connecting point to help people find the needed resources and programs. As with the ESL

programs, it is vital to observe the underlying issues that would lead to the need for these support systems. In other words, one must look at the issue of domestic violence that is occurring amongst Hispanic women before delving into how the church can assist women.

In 2020, a study took place that observed the different rates of intimate personal violence (IPV) that occurred between ethnic and racial groups. IPV refers to any kind of abuse committed by a significant other. Such abuses that fall under this category of IPV, as the study explained, include psychological, physical, emotional, verbal, and or sexual. Likewise, this study was observing if these kinds of abuse occurred in current or past relationships. The report found that 37.1 percent of Hispanic women have experienced IPV within their lifetime. In comparison to other ethnicities, this percentage of IPV amongst Hispanic women is lower than among Black women, with 43.7 percent reporting IPV, and Indigenous women, with 46 percent reporting IPV (Reyes et al.).

Hispanic women in rural areas are at even greater risk of IPV. In another study, researchers found that 70 percent of Hispanic women in rural South Carolina reported either experiencing IPV or being threatened with violence. Likewise, in a study conducted by the Center for Women's Health Research at the University of North Carolina, pregnant Hispanic women reported higher physical (10.3 percent) abuse than any other ethnicity. These statistics must come from women who reported IPV, yet the actual percentage of Hispanic women experiencing IPV may be higher as some may have been too fearful to report such abuse (Behnke et al.).

From an outsider's perspective, one might ask, "If these women are being abused and treated so horribly, why are they not reaching out for help?" Abuse is a complex issue, and many factors can contribute to Hispanic women not reaching out for help. The first factor to consider

that hinders Hispanic women from getting help is the cultural value of “machismo” and “marianismo.” Machismo is the concept that puts a significant emphasis on hard work, hyper maleness, and hypersexuality. In machismo, men need to assert their dominance and authority over other men and women. Marianismo is the opposite of machismo, which focuses on women's roles. Unlike the former, which emphasizes dominance, marianismo emphasizes submission and “accept their husband’s activities as an obligation (Espinoza et al.).”

How do these cultural values play a factor in hindering abuse prevention and support? With machismo, men may see abuse as acceptable as it allows them to assert their dominance. Abuse, whether verbal, physical, or sexual, to a man, gives a sense of power and control because often, a person who is receiving the abuse is too afraid to fight back or speak out in fear of receiving more abuse. This fear of more abuse is a possibility as to why women do not reach out for help. The question remains: how does marianismo play a factor? With marianismo, women take on the abuse because they believe it is an obligation as a wife or significant other. It is their role as a wife to appease their husband, even if that means taking on physical, verbal, and or emotional abuse.

Likewise, within marianismo, there is a high emphasis on respecting their husbands with hesitation (Espinoza et al.). Thus, women may perceive reaching out for help or telling others about the abuse they receive from their husbands as disrespecting their husbands and going against social norms. Furthermore, in another study observing culture and why Hispanic women did not reach out for help, they found that “childhood and cultural influences that led many women to misperceive IPV as normal and acceptable behavior meant that these women did not even consider the possibility of help-seeking (Rizo and Macy).”



Another factor to consider, as stated above, is the language barrier as well as immigration status. How big of a barrier do these two factors put up for Hispanic women trying to receive help from IPV? This is the question Irma Santana wanted to answer in her study *Domestic Violence in Hispanics in the Southeastern United States: A Survey and Needs Analysis*. In her research, Santana had 309 Hispanic women complete a questionnaire called *De Mujer a Mujer* (From Woman to Woman) and asked about the abuse they received as well as barriers that prevented them from receiving help. Out of the sample, 182 women (or 76 percent) reported that the inability to speak English prevented them from receiving the help they needed. Likewise, 156 of these women (or 69 percent) stated that having no one to translate for them was a barrier to these services. Fear of deportation was the second largest barrier, with 171 women (or 72 percent of the sample) claiming this reason as to why they did not reach out. In short, language and immigration status play a significant role in preventing women from receiving help and support from their abuse and thus continue to suffer in silence (Murdaugh et al.).

According to a study by the *American Journal of Community Psychology*, Hispanic women are more likely than non-Hispanic women to report to their pastor or other church staff about the IPV they face at home (Sabina et al.). Although women often go to the church for help first, pastors and other church leaders are usually unequipped to help these women. In fact, in a 2015 study, 77.8 percent of pastors felt that they were not prepared to handle domestic abuse situations (Zust et al.). Even worse, a pastor not equipped to assist domestic abuse victims may provide advice that makes the problem worse and puts not only the woman at risk but the pastor as well.

To have a better understanding of how unprepared pastors are and areas for these church leaders to improve, one must look at the general responses of how they would respond to

domestic abuse situations. This is what a study from the *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* tried to uncover. Surveying 28 Latino pastors and clergy, the study asked these leaders what their beliefs are on domestic violence. Likewise, the survey asked what these church leaders would do when given specific domestic violence scenarios. Some of these scenarios included the following:

“Francisco grew up seeing his father hurt his mother. Because his mother did nothing to stop the violence, Francisco accepted this as how families dealt with disagreements. As an adult, he lashes out at his wife when he sees her doing things he doesn’t like. He has often left bruises and once caused her to break a tooth. What do you think a lay minister should do (Behnke et al.)?”

“Before Jorge and Esmeralda came to the United States, he worked to support the family, and she stayed home and cared for their children. After they came here, Esmeralda learned to drive and insisted on getting a job. Currently, she has a steady job at a hotel, but he hasn’t had much work because of the recent downturn in construction jobs. He feels really frustrated and ashamed for not being able to better support his family. After hearing a few recent comments made by neighbors, he let her have it. And she ended up in the emergency room. By hitting her he felt no better, but he didn’t know what else he could do. What do you think a lay minister should do (Behnke et al.)?”

In response to these scenarios, sixty-seven percent of these church leaders would try to give these couples some counseling. While marriage counseling in itself is not a wrong method to use, the problem the study found with these pastors and leaders is the type of counsel that they were providing. For example, with the Francisco scenario, many respondents stated that they would confront Francisco and explain his wrongdoings. Some of the other responses included

discussing with the abuser how his actions are ruining the marriage. While pastors and leaders may have the right intentions, this method of directly confronting the abuser is dangerous. Experts state that this method, as well as counseling in general, can put the victim and the pastor at risk (Behnke et al.).

What is somewhat concerning is the percentage of church leaders who recommended outside resources to their congregants. Only twenty-one percent of the respondents from the survey recommended that the victim seek legal action or the involvement of law enforcement. Similarly, only eighteen percent referred their victims to community resources. Such community resources can include domestic violence prevention centers, emergency shelters, etc. (Behnke et al.). The low percentage for legal/law enforcement advice might be considered excusable as there could be concerns about the victim's immigration status, and having the law involved may lead to further problems. Because of the low percentage of people referring to outside sources, it is possible that pastors themselves are not aware of these resources. Nevertheless, these low percentages of referring victims to valuable resources are unacceptable and must be changed. Women should not continue to suffer at the hands of their abuser because they are not receiving proper advice and support.

### **3.3 How the Church Provide Better Support Against Domestic Abuse**

If the church has not been effective in providing resources and materials that women may need when dealing with domestic abuse previously, then why state these churches should be used for helping women against domestic abuse? When facing abuse, Hispanic women are more likely than non-Hispanic women to go to their churches. Therefore, it is essential to reiterate the significance of religiosity in Hispanic culture. Though the church has not assisted victims

properly in the past, it does not mean it needs to stay this way. Furthermore, pastors and leaders seem to desire to help these victims, as a majority of them stated they would provide counseling in hypothetical abuse scenarios. What can one do to help these churches better help these women?

The key to improving is better education about domestic abuse, prevention, and what church leaders can do to help. The same report that observed how pastors would respond to the hypothetical abuse also revealed some of the misconceptions that they had concerning domestic abuse. For example, two-fifths of respondents agreed with the statement that women would not be beaten in the first place if they only changed their behavior. Many of these leaders, when they see that the abuser is struggling with substance abuse, try to steer the responsibility of the abuse from the abuser instead of the substance itself. As the report states, the substance itself is not responsible for the violence the abuser commits against the victim. Certainly, the abuser may need assistance in overcoming the addiction to the substance, but they are still fully responsible for their actions. The final misunderstanding that the report mentioned that needs to be fixed is that a large percentage of these respondents did not comprehend that this abuse affects not only the victim herself but also the children of the family (Behnke et al.). With more of an accurate understanding of domestic violence, these pastors can better assist women in finding the resources that they need.

How does one better inform these church leaders so they can better help victims? One option is to have a training module from a professional domestic abuse program that all church staff must attend. In these modules, staff would learn not only what abuse is but also the warning signs to look for, how the church can help victims, resources available for victims (to which the church can point these women), and other important information. Fortunately, there are many

domestic violence programs out there that churches can choose. For example, there is the Safe and Together Institute, which offers in-person training modules and online sessions. Likewise, this institute provides not only tools to help victims but also tools on how to be an excellent ally to these victims (“Domestic Violence Training Courses and Education Resources”).

Another program available for churches to use is called Rainbow Services. Not only would they be able to provide training for church staff, but for church members as well. Likewise, Rainbow Services provides training for the specific areas where Hispanic churches have misunderstandings. For example, there is a module about domestic violence's impact on children (“Domestic Violence Education Programs”). Rainbow Services also offers a hotline that provides services for Spanish speakers as well. Thus, no language barrier prevents church leaders and congregants from receiving the help they need.

### **3.4 The Church and Mental Health Support**

Mental health is another issue that the Hispanic community faces. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (also known as SAMHSA), 22 percent of Hispanics reported having a mental illness. Furthermore, suicide is the third leading cause of death among Hispanics (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration). Not only do these mental health issues exist, but the number of Hispanics experiencing these health concerns is growing exponentially as well. Between 2008 and 2018, serious mental illnesses increased in Hispanic young adults (ages 18 to 25) from 4 to 6.4 percent. Within the same time frame, Hispanic adults from ages 26-49 also saw an increase in severe mental illness from 2.2 to 3.9 percent (“Latinx/Hispanic Communities and Mental Health”).

While the term serious mental illness can cover a large variety of diseases, it is crucial to observe some of the specific illnesses that Hispanics face. Depression is one of the illnesses on the rise in the Hispanic community. From 2015 to 2018, Hispanic youth (or children ages 12 to 17) who experienced major depressive episodes jumped from 12.6 to 15.1 percent. In three years, the amount of these episodes increased by almost one percent each year. If these episodes continued to grow at this same rate, then by 2045, 38 percent of Hispanic youth would be experiencing these detrimental episodes. Hispanic youth are not the only age group facing a rise in major depressive episodes. Likewise, young adults (18-25) saw an increase from 8 to 12 percent, and adults (26-49) facing these episodes increased from 4.5 to 6 percent (“Latinx”).

Not only are severe depressive episodes a major predicament that has increased within the Hispanic community but also suicidal thoughts. In 2008, 402,000 Hispanics aged from 18 to 25 had severe thoughts of suicide. A decade later, that number increased by 248,000, with 650,000 Hispanic young adults reporting thoughts of suicide. Likewise, the number of attempts committed by young adults during this time frame increased proportionally from 91,000 people attempting suicide to 151,000 people (“Latinx”). Although these overall mental health issues are lower than the overall United States average, Hispanics are still at a greater risk for mental as many do not receive the care they need. Despite 22 percent of Hispanics having reported a mental illness, only 35 percent received treatment (Moyce et al.). In contrast, about 50 percent of non-Hispanics with mental illnesses reported receiving treatment.

With mental health issues on the rise for Hispanics (and with no signs of decreasing), why are Hispanics not receiving the services they need especially in contrast to their non-Hispanic counterparts? Language barriers, as stated above in the discussion about domestic violence, play a role in lack of treatment but misunderstanding and stigmas are arguably the two

largest hindrances to mental health treatment for Hispanics. What are the misconceptions that Hispanics have about mental health? Likewise, what are the stigmas around?

In 2022, a survey was conducted in which Hispanic adults were asked to define mental health as well as address various stigmas around it. The Hispanics asked to complete the study originated from a range of different Latin American countries such as Mexico, Ecuador, Colombia, and Venezuela. Most of the responses regarding the definition of mental health are the same as those regarding stress management. Some of the specific statements from the survey included, “Mental health for me has much to do with coping with stress,” or “Mental is... when one does not have stress.” These respondents did not acknowledge how mental health also includes issues such as depression, burnout, etc. (Moyce et al.).

In the same survey, when asked why Hispanics do not reach out for help, many stated they were afraid of being judged. Likewise, there is a stigma that those struggling with mental illnesses are “crazy,” as one respondent noted, “The bad thing is when the person does not accept it (mental illness). They don’t accept any opinion, or they keep saying, “No, no, I am fine. I don’t have anything; I am not crazy.” Another respondent had a similar answer concerning the “crazy” stigma about mental health as she stated, “Many people in the Hispanic community if you say—or especially the men, if you say, “You need to go to the psychologist.” [They say,] “Oh, I am not crazy (Moyce et al.).”

Before discussing how the church and religion can assist Hispanics in breaking down these stigmas as well as help Hispanics get the help they need, it is vital to recognize the church’s role in creating some of these debilitating stigmas that hinder Hispanics. First, particular churches have developed the concept that mental illness is a sign of a lack of faith or that the person combatting the illness has not prayed enough. There is evidence for this stigma from a

survey in which 64 Hispanics from three different churches (both Protestant and Catholic) were asked to share their thoughts about mental illness. When asked the question, “If one prayed more, he/she could be cured,” to which 44 percent responded that they agreed or strongly agreed (Caplan). In one case, a Hispanic man who has bipolar disorder never took medication because he felt that his relationship with God would heal him. Likewise, there are some Caribbean Latinos who believe mental illness and its side effects are a sign of demonic possession (Caplan and Cordero). Similarly, 68 percent of respondents agreed that “The main cause of suicide is a lack of faith in God. (Caplan).” Faith can play a beneficial role in providing some comfort to mental illnesses or helping walk through dark times, but there are times when medical action is necessary.

Leaders of the church are most certainly reinforcing these stigmas as well, as many of them share similar thought processes regarding mental illness. In the same study conducted about how religious Hispanics perceive mental illness, researchers took the time to interview church leaders. Once again, faith (or lack of it) appeared to be the “root” of the problem of mental illness. For example, one church leader called her sister’s bipolar disorder a “loss of her soul.” Another leader stated that “negative thoughts, worries, obsessions, and depressive thinking was the work of the Devil (Caplan and Cordero).” As stated in the first section, religiosity plays a vital role in Hispanic culture; thus, if church leaders state that mental illnesses are only a faith issue and not a medical condition, then many Hispanics will perceive it as a faith issue. Thus, those struggling with mental health issues will not receive the help they need, even though mental health is just as crucial as physical health.

### **3.5 El Buen Consejo Model: Bringing the Church and Mental Health Together**



Suppose the church is contributing to negative stigmas that are hindering Hispanics from receiving the help they need in terms of mental health. Why should it be considered an effective solution to dissolving said stigmas? Likewise, how can churches recommend sources for medical sources if they do not believe mental illnesses are a medical issue? While the church has hindered Hispanics, both in the past and present, from receiving mental health services, that does not mean that predicament is unalterable. Instead, there are methods to integrate mental health care and church. To reiterate, the church and the community that arises from it are crucial in the Hispanic community. Likewise, as stated previously, church leaders significantly influence their congregations. Why not use this influence to advocate for different resources so that Hispanics can learn about mental health care as well as erase preexisting stigmas?

How does one unite mental health care and church together? This is the question that El Buen Consejo, a mental health literacy program, has pursued to answer in their study. El Buen took mental health information and adapted it to blend Hispanic culture and faith within this knowledge. The program wanted to make certain that this crucial medical information could be explained in a way that was culturally sensitive but still working to erase these misunderstandings about mental health. For example, the program recognized that congregants viewed prayer as extremely important to healing and could even lead to miracles. Therefore, when educating on mental health literacy, one of the leaders stated that “we believe that God heals and that prayer can change one’s life. However, medical treatment may be God’s way of starting the healing process.” This response not only respected that prayer is essential (and likewise did not disregard it in any way) but also corrected beliefs that mental health could only be healed via prayer or that mental health was a spiritual issue (Caplan and Cordero).

El Buen Consejo not only incorporated important religious values into their mental education but also cultural values. One of these values is the concept of familismo or the importance of the family structure. To integrate this concept into the program, El Buen Consejo talked about the stresses and experiences of the families of someone battling against mental issues. Likewise, the program informed congregants about resources available for families. Such resources included different programs for families to meet other families in a similar situation and establish a sense of community. Not only did this family-focused education discuss resources for the families themselves, but more importantly, it instructed families and congregants on how best to support their loved ones (Caplan and Cordero).

While it is essential to recognize the various religious and cultural aspects that were integrated into mental health education, it is essential to know what exactly was taught about mental health. Some of the content included but was not limited to “types of mental illnesses, symptoms, recognition, and personal stories of the lives of people in recovery from mental illness,” as well as medical treatments for depression, how to overcome previously stated barriers to mental health care, the difference between stress and mental illnesses, and more. The educators, likewise, were of reliable background as one was a mental health researcher, another a family nurse practitioner with experience working amongst the Hispanic community, and the author of some of the mental health literacy programs used (Caplan and Cordero). Church clergy and lay leaders were also present at the time of these programs but acted as participants.

How effective were El Buen Consejo’s culturally and religiously integrated mental literacy education programs? El Buen Consejo conducted surveys and interviews with over 45 congregants to reveal their program's effectiveness. In their results, the program found that most respondents were moved by the information they heard, especially the stories of mental health

issues and how people overcame these obstacles. Likewise, this format provided in the church setting made respondents feel comfortable, especially in the group settings. This may not be objective proof of these programs' effectiveness, but it is a good sign, considering congregants responded positively to medical education on mental health. Being optimistic about mental education would lead to more Hispanics being informed, which would erase stigmas and more willing to receive the medical help they need when experiencing mental health problems (Caplan and Cordero). Thus, El Buen Consejo can serve as a model to other churches on how to incorporate these mental health programs into their houses of worship.

## **Chapter 4: How to Plant More of These Churches**

### **4.1 Steps to Take Before the Establishment of the Church**

Protestant churches are a necessity within the Hispanic community as they not only provide a community (a necessary step for self-actualization), provide language learning services and domestic abuse support, and can even help Hispanics learn more about mental health and receive the services they need. Likewise, as stated in the first chapter, more and more Hispanics are converting to Protestantism with no signs of slowing down. Despite this growth, there are still not enough Protestant churches to support these needs, especially for Hispanics not living in or near large cities. How does one address this issue? In a few words, the answer is simple: plant more churches. The physical act of planting churches, however, is not as simple as just three words. Planting churches takes time, dedicated people, and resources; the whole process can be overwhelming. Thus, a strategy is necessary to be overwhelmed and know how to go about the process.

How does one plant a church? Before even beginning to conceptualize the idea of planting a church, the first thing one should do is pray. From a Christian perspective, attempting a ministry without praying to the Lord first is the highest form of arrogance. After that point, it is important to note that there are several different models of church planting and recognize which one to use. Some models include but are not limited to purpose-based, seeker-based, ministry-based, relation-based, and affinity-based church planting. With a focus on a specific demographic and their needs, the affinity-based church planting model would most likely be the best model for Hispanic/bilingual protestant church planters to follow (Alawode). What does this model look like in practice?

When planting a church, it is crucial to understand the church planters' role. The first concept to comprehend about the role of the church planter is that the planter does not have a singular function but several positions that evolve as the plant continues to grow and its needs change as well. The first function is similar to that of an entrepreneur. The planter has a vision/dream of starting a new church, but this dream can only become a reality with the support from the community and other churches. To receive said support, the planter must make their intentions known publicly, thus including the logistics of how and where they want to start a church and the resources they need (e.g., monetary needs, a building, etc.) As an entrepreneur, a planter must be willing to create this vision, see it come to fruition, and recognize the possibility that it might fail (Baumgartner and Flores).

Once the foundation is secured, the role of a church planter transitions into that of an evangelist/recruiter. In this position, the planter is focused on bringing people into the church as well as sharing the Gospel with them. The plant must develop strategies of evangelism that fulfill the needs of the specific group of people that they are trying to reach. For example, for a planter

wanting to start a church for Spanish speakers, they are evangelism would be using the Spanish language and appealing to the cultural values. To appeal to cultural values and thus bring more people to the church, a planter may emphasize that the church has study groups for the entire family as family plays a significant role in Hispanic culture (Baumgartner and Flores).

With more people attending the church, the needs of the church continue to grow, and such demands become much larger for a single church planter to handle. Therefore, the planter's role changes once again from recruiter to trainer/teacher. The teaching and training required are not necessarily for the congregants but for new leaders and pastors. These pastors and leaders can help meet the needs of congregants as well as fulfill other tasks so that the planter can continue to strengthen the new church's placement so that it does not wither and die (Baumgartner and Flores).

After understanding the church planter's role, that planter must develop a mission statement (this is part of their role as an entrepreneur and in creating a vision). This part of the church planting process is crucial as a mission statement can help a planter and supporters know what paths to take when making certain decisions and help future congregants understand what they will be a part of. Mission statements likewise help congregants join the church in the first place as they want to find a church that aligns with their beliefs. The mission statement should be no more than 25 words and should declare the church's purpose, information about how the church will make decisions, a statement on the church's identity, as well as a statement on where the church wants to go in the future (McRay). While discussing the various aspects of a mission statement is good, it is even better to examine an example of a functioning church's mission statement.

For example, Pleasant City Church, a thriving church in Shelby, North Carolina, has a mission statement of “Love God, Connect with Others, and Reach the World (“Our Vision”).” Although quite brief, this mission statement incorporates all the recommendations for a church statement. With Pleasant City’s statement, one can understand its purpose to love God, which leads to connecting with the surrounding community and reaching the world with the Gospel. Likewise, this love for God will influence the church’s decisions as a church that loves God will also love His Word, or the Bible, which gives guidance and instruction on how to make certain decisions within the church. Therefore, it is safe to assume that the Bible influences the church’s decisions. The “reach the world” aspect reveals the church’s future plans as a goal as large as this cannot be achieved in one day and requires planning.

## **4.2 Fundraising, Publicity, and the Physical Building**

Starting a church does not come without a cost. Depending on whether the church being planted is being started completely on its own or sprouting as another site for a pre-existing church, the financial costs of church planting can vary greatly. However, the exact financial cost of church planting is what the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability sought to find in their 2022 survey. This survey collected information from 2,702 participants, most of whom were church planters and the lesser from multisite church directors. According to this survey, a new church with less than a hundred congregants had a startup cost of \$10,000. By the end of the first year of the church's launch, planters reported spending over \$60,000. Larger churches, on the other hand, with over 200 congregants, reported spending about \$100,000 on their startups. The end of the first year of operation rallied up to \$325,000 (Bird). Where are these high costs

going? Many factors include the cost of the building itself and its maintenance, as well as staffing. In short, starting up a church is not a cheap venture and requires a lot of money.

As money does not grow on trees, one might ask how one acquires such funding. Fundraising is the key to success for such financing. Likewise, not only can fundraising bring in monetary needs, but it can also attract more people to join the budding church. It also creates a sense of community, allowing people to unite for a singular goal to help the community. For fundraising, the Foundation Group argues that writing letters asking for funding, creating a website, and community engagement are the best fundraising methods (McRay). In short, publicity is key when trying to fund a church startup. How can a church plan to receive monetary support if the public does not know of the church's plans or even its existence?

What is the best format for receiving publicity, especially for Hispanic/bilingual church startups? That is the question that Lifeway Research hoped to answer in its Hispanic Church Planting Report, in which it gathered information from 218 churches to understand some of the best practices for planting churches, including effective publicity practices. In response to the question, "What were the top 3 forms of publicity most frequently used to communicate news of a new church in the community?" An overwhelming majority of 93 percent stated that word of mouth or personal relationships were how they shared about their church. Following behind word of mouth was social media, with 50 percent of respondents reporting using this method (LifeWay Research et al.). While it is crucial to understand the methods many Hispanic churches use, it still does not answer the question of the method's effectiveness.

From the same report, when asked the question of what two practices were most successful in bringing new people to the church, 90 percent of planters of Hispanic churches stated word of mouth and personal relationships worked best. The use of community events,

likewise, helped planters to make use of the word of mouth and personal relationships stratagem. Some of these events include but are not limited to, outreach Bible studies, door-to-door evangelism, fun social events, service projects, and events for children. Social media again followed second, with 38 percent of planters stating this strategy was successful. Likewise, these sources and their statements about the effectiveness are credible, as 99 percent of the new church plants that used these methods still exist today (LifeWay Research et al.). Furthermore, these churches are not only existing but thriving, and five years after the plant, these churches reported having an average of 81 people in weekly attendance. Even in the first year of these newly planted churches, planters reported having 31 people on average on Sundays (LifeWay Research et al.).

After receiving the funding as well as working on the publicity of these new churches, the next step of church planting is to find the actual building itself (McRay). Although a majority of planters of Hispanic churches reported starting a church in an actual church building, a building with steeples and pews is not the only place to start a church. A church can start in a house, a recreation center, a school, and so many other places. Likewise, just because a church does not start in a physical church building, it does not have to remain in a house, rec center, etc., forever. In fact, 30 percent of church planters stated that they started their church in a house in Lifeway's survey. Then, when asked if those churches were still in a house at the time of the study, only six percent of planters stated that their church was in a house (LifeWay Research et al.). Thus, the shape of the church is flexible and can easily change as the church grows.

#### **4.3 Support from Sponsor/Mother Churches**



While the prospect of church planting can appear and be a daunting battle, one does not need to fulfill the tasks of fundraising, finding a building, or the other necessary preparations alone. Rather, a sponsor or mother church can assist church planters with establishing a church. According to Lifeway's *Hispanic Church Planting Report*, 61 percent of planters relied on the assistance of a sponsor or mother church. How would these sponsors or mother churches aid with new churches? First, many of these sponsor churches loaned out either pastors or other church leaders for the new church plant (LifeWay Research et al.). This way, the planting church does not need to worry about who preaches for Sunday or leads different programs as planters search for full-time pastors and leaders.

Not only can these sponsor churches loan out leaders, but they also assist in the establishment of new pastors and other church leaders. While assisting in the search for a pastor often lays the church planters' responsibility, sponsor churches frequently help train and mentor these new pastors and other leaders. Hispanic church plants reported that 56 percent of sponsors trained new church leaders. In a similar fashion, 64 percent of Hispanic church plants stated that their sponsor churches provided mentorship to new leaders (LifeWay Research et al.). To reiterate from above, these methods are effective as these statistics came from churches that were still growing and thriving years after the church plant.

Assisting with leadership is not the only help that sponsors or mother churches provide, as sponsor churches can also provide support for the physical needs of the new church. One such manner in which sponsor churches can and have helped develop new churches is with monetary support and assistance with financial management. In a survey, 66 percent of Hispanic church plants stated they received financial oversight from their sponsor church. Likewise, 70 percent of Hispanic church plants stated that their sponsor provided administrative support, and within this

administrative assistance were mentions of financial management, such as accounting (LifeWay Research et al.). This assistance alleviates the load of the church planter so that they can focus on other necessary tasks, such as supporting the needs of congregants and growing the church.

Another physical need that many sponsor churches can support is with providing a physical building for church plants to gather. Many sponsor churches allow Hispanic church plants to meet in the sponsor's church building, with 57 percent of sponsors allowing the plant to start in their building (LifeWay Research et al.). One might ask, how can two churches function under the same building? Will not having two services hinder the functions of the other church? Will language still play factor between the two? Can two church services occur at the same time or do churches have to have services on different days?

Observing an example of churches already using this method is essential to answer that question. One such example is Iglesia Casa de Restauración (House of Restoration Church), a Hispanic church in Johnson City, Tennessee. Casa de Restauración serves as a sponsor church for a new Vietnamese church plant in the Tri-Cities area, allowing the plant to have services in Casa's building. On Sundays, Casa de Restauración has its Spanish-speaking service and Sunday school in the mornings. Upon finishing their services (which end around 12:45 pm), the congregants of Casa leave the building so that the Vietnamese church has full access to the building for their services at 1. These churches do not always act independently from each other; instead, there are many times when there is a collaborative worship service. Likewise, the two churches sometimes join in between their services to have lunch in the dining area.

Another example of two churches under one roof is with for Casa de Restauración's daughter church in Bristol, also called Casa de Restauración. Being smaller in size in comparison to its Johnson City counterpart, the Bristol church meets in the basement of another Baptist

church. The two churches have services that run around the same time as being separated by two floors means that the two services will not get in the way of the other church.

## **5. Conclusion**

The need for Hispanic Protestant churches in the United States is growing as the number of Hispanic Protestants is increasing significantly, especially in the last few years. However, the recent surge of Hispanic Protestants is not the result of a new movement but a journey that has lasted well over a century and shows no signs of stopping. These churches provide a place for worship and a sense of community and unity as people gather together from similar cultural backgrounds and use the same language, Spanish. As Maslow states in his hierarchy of needs, community is crucial for a person to reach their fullest potential, and that is why places like churches are so important. Likewise, the church is essential for creating community. It plays a vital role in Hispanic culture as many profess to attend church weekly or believe their faith is important to them.

Although the number of churches that provide this place of community suffices for now, the need for more Hispanic churches in the United States is growing stronger daily. This increasing need can be accredited to the increasing population of Hispanic Americans and the number of Hispanic immigrants. It is important to note that although historically, many Hispanics have resided in large metropolitan areas, there is a projected growth of Hispanics in other areas, such as rural and suburban zones. Therefore, churches must look to these areas to start new churches, as currently, 50 percent of Hispanic Protestant churches are located only in large cities.

These churches serve as the essential role of community builders but also provide other crucial services. For example, some of these Hispanic churches provided ESL programs that allowed parents the opportunity to learn English. These English education programs were vital to parents since they did not have access to ESL education as their children do in the public education system. Furthermore, a large percentage of immigrant Hispanic parents were not proficient in the language. Likewise, most people in the United States only speak English, so to survive, parents must learn English.

Not only did churches help Hispanics learn crucial English skills, but they also helped women receive the domestic abuse support that they needed. According to various studies and surveys, Hispanic women are less likely to reach out for help either due to language barriers or due to cultural values such as machismo and marianismo. To reiterate from above, machismo emphasizes the hyper maleness and hypersexuality that often makes men feel they need to put others down to make themselves feel superior. Abuse is a way for these men to assert their dominance and to keep their wives “in their place.” Marianismo is the concept that women should respect and accept their husbands’ activities without question and thus not speak out in fear that it would disrespect their husbands and harm their role as wives.

Though the church has failed in the past in regard to helping these women and reinforcing some of these toxic parts of culture, there is no denying the influence the church has over Hispanics. In fact, when facing a crisis, many Hispanic women report to their church before any other program or person. This considerable influence can be used for domestic abuse and education. In other words, churches could be educated on domestic abuse as well as resources available to not only better handle domestic abuse situations but to also pass on that information to women currently facing these situations. In order to pass on said information, church leaders

must be informed themselves about domestic abuse, and thankfully, there are many outside resources that not only will instruct leaders but themselves. Furthermore, the concerns for language barriers hindering this education is not a factor as there are hotlines and training modules that are in Spanish.

Churches provide mental health care support. As with domestic abuse support, the church has failed in the past in terms of helping Hispanics receive the support they need by reinforcing certain stigmas and myths about mental health and how to treat it. Despite these flaws, that does not mean there is no room for change for the better. Similarly to the domestic abuse support issue, the large influence that church has on Hispanics can be used to educate Hispanics about the truths of mental health. This process of using the church as an education center for mental health and care can be achieved by equipping the church itself with proper education.

One manner in which this positive change can be achieved is with a method that El Buen Consejo used. El Buen Consejo taught the truths of mental education while incorporating aspects of faith as well as Hispanic culture. Incorporating cultural and faith values into mental education will make people more receptive to mental health education. Likewise, by being more informed about mental health and care, the stigmas will be received, and more Hispanics will reach out for help.

The solution to this lack of Hispanic Protestant churches in the United States is to plant more, yet the task is easier said than done. A person aspiring to plant a church must develop a mission statement and a plan of action to grow the church. Fundraising and publicity are the first steps, as a church needs people to attend the church for it to thrive and for monetary support. For most Hispanic churches, the most effective methods of fundraising and publicity occur via word of mouth and various community events. Following the fundraising, the church plant needs a

building, whether an actual church building or a house. Likewise, a church planter must find pastors and other church leaders to continue developing the church. While these tasks may be overwhelming, a church planter is not alone. Mother or sponsor churches can assist planters by providing training, a physical building, and other crucial needs.

Now is the time to act and plant more of these Hispanic Protestant churches, as the Hispanic Protestant movement is on fire. This need for more churches is not just for religion's sake, but these churches can benefit the Hispanic community in many different ways outside of the concept of religion. However, the only people who can make this growth happen are those who are brave enough to take the first step forward.

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