

Article

## Responses by White Christians to Recent Latino Immigration in the Rural U.S. Midwest

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**Abstract:** Over the last twenty-five years, the rural U.S. Midwest has undergone dramatic demographic changes as the population of white people decreased in many areas and the number of Latinos surged. These shifts are especially noteworthy in areas that had stable, relatively homogeneous populations over at least the last half-century. Many Christian churches, both Protestant and Catholic, are responding by reaching out to new residents. Such efforts have sometimes led to tension as Anglo Christians seek to reconcile the moral claims of their faith communities with the prejudices and fears they have of Latino immigrants. This article describes how Anglo-majority mainline Protestant congregations and Catholic parishes are responding to these demographic changes, notes key differences between the two groups' responses, and then sketches several possible explanations for the differences, including the underlying theology of their efforts, the prior religious affiliation of Latino newcomers, the organizational structure of church bodies, and varying impetuses for action. The paper concludes with observations about the future of Christian communities in the rural Midwest.

**Keywords:** immigration; U.S. Midwest; multiracial congregations; Christianity; mainline Protestantism; Roman Catholicism

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## 1. Introduction

The rural Midwest has undergone dramatic demographic change in the past several decades, with white populations decreasing in many areas and Latino populations increasing.<sup>1</sup> For example, the white population decreased in more than 85 percent of Nebraska counties, and more than 70 percent of Iowa counties saw such a decrease.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, the Latino population increased in every county in both states, more than tripling overall.<sup>3</sup> Twenty counties in Nebraska and fifteen counties in Iowa had Latino populations that increased more than 1000 percent between 1990 and 2013. For instance, Dawson County, Nebraska, went from just over 3 percent Latino to 33 percent Latino during that period; the population of Colfax County, also in Nebraska, went from just under 3 percent to more than 40 percent Latino. Several towns with very few Latinos in 1990 have, over the course of just more than two decades, become majority Latino.

Locales have been working to respond to these changes, which have affected many sectors of community life, including downtown businesses, schools, community organizations, and churches. Many predominantly Anglo Christian churches, both Protestant and Catholic, are reaching out to recent immigrants—a process that has sometimes been fraught with challenges, as Anglo Christians seek to reconcile the moral claims of their faith communities with the concerns they have about Latino immigrants. In this article I describe the various responses among Anglo-majority mainline Protestant congregations and Catholic parishes, highlighting the way that the approaches differ from each other, and then propose possible explanations for those differences, including differing theological perspectives, the prior religious affiliation of Latino newcomers, varying organizational structure and polity of church bodies, and contrasting motivations for acting.

## 2. Context

Congregations' responses to their changing communities are taking place in a broader social context, one often characterized by concern and suspicion. Some in the rural communities are concerned about what the demographic shifts mean for their towns, and some are responding with animosity.<sup>4</sup> Fremont, Nebraska, for instance, received national media attention for its anti-immigration

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<sup>1</sup> Some clarifications about scope and language are in order. The Midwest is often understood to include Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota and Wisconsin [1]. My study focuses more narrowly on the Great Plains states of Nebraska and Iowa, though the phenomena under consideration extend beyond those states. In the United States, people whose national origin or that of their ancestors is from Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America are often referred to as “Hispanic” or “Latino”. There are differing perspectives on which is to be preferred, as well as regional preferences (see, for example, [2]). I have chosen to use “Latino” in this article.

<sup>2</sup> The median county in Iowa lost 8.5 percent of its white population; the median county in Nebraska lost 15.5 percent. See [3–5].

<sup>3</sup> In Nebraska, for instance, the Latino population increased from 2.3 percent to 9.9 percent overall from 1990 to 2013. See [3–5].

<sup>4</sup> Certainly, not all people have responded to newcomers with animosity. In fact, following the 2006 Immigration and Customs Enforcement raid of the Agriprocessors plant in Postville, Iowa, more than a thousand people from nearby communities protested the raids, and Catholic and Lutheran faith communities in Postville and nearby Decorah worked together with others to provide needed support to those who had been affected. For an analysis of the response, see [6,7].

ordinance, which prohibits renting to people without proper documents and requires employers to use the E-verify system [8]. The ordinance was first voted down by the city council at a contentious and widely attended hearing in 2008. The mayor cast the tie-breaking vote, explaining that he was not supporting immigrants but rather was concerned about the financial costs of defending the city against the inevitable lawsuits [9]. The ordinance was then passed in June 2010 through a petition effort and later upheld in court [10]. The Fremont ordinance is only one example of a range of anti-immigrant legislation at the local and state levels. A study of immigration-related legislation introduced in midwestern states in 2009 and 2010 found that Nebraska and Iowa were the most exclusionary, with most of their bills seeking to exclude people without proper documentation from being hired or receiving public benefits [1].

In addition to supporting government action through legislation, some of those concerned about new immigrants are moving away to avoid the “threat” they perceive. One woman who removed her children from the Lexington, Nebraska, schools said, “My kids aren’t going to be held back because of the Hispanics. It seems like they work more with Hispanics, the White kids are just pushed aside” ([11], cited in [12]). After analyzing Lexington’s loss over a decade of more than a thousand white students, hundreds of whom withdrew to nearby school districts with fewer Latinos, Joseph Farnsworth explains: “When describing this enrollment phenomenon the data are clear: White students are leaving for reasons tied to issues of race” [12]. Many nearby communities, almost entirely white, have grown as white residents of Lexington have moved.<sup>5</sup> Several of my respondents mentioned that the phenomenon was taking place in their communities as well. For instance, Pastor Chris,<sup>6</sup> pastor of a mainline Protestant congregation, explained, “A lot of whites, probably one-third of the people, went away.” He continued, “I’m hearing every day of another family leaving...Caucasian families with school-age kids, especially grades one through six.” Concerns about the quality and experience of education seemed to be a driving force in many white people’s decision to leave.

Such legislative and individual efforts reflect broader community attitudes. According to David Reimers, “all major national polls since World War II reported opposition to increases [in immigration] or at best ambivalence about newcomers” ([13], p. 29). Leo Chavez describes the “Latino threat”, the set of concerns that many white Americans and media portrayals have about Latino immigrants in particular. According to this narrative, “Latinos are...altering the demographic makeup of the nation. Latinos are unable or unwilling to learn...or unwilling to integrate into the larger society...[T]hey are not subject to history and the transforming social forces around them; they reproduce their own cultural world” ([14], p. 51). In other words, Latinos are dangerous because they are creating their own, separate way of life, threatening America through an unwillingness to assimilate. Thus, white families that leave communities in transition are deciding preemptively that their children will suffer in a school with Latino classmates. This sense of Latino threat continues, despite clear evidence that it does not correspond to the lived reality of actual Latino immigrants. As Chavez notes, “Latinos make impressive improvements in education, income, and use of English as they gain generational experience in the United States...Rather than living apart from the larger

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<sup>5</sup> According to [12], “In fact, the census shows white population growth in all towns within a 40-mile radius of Lexington.”

<sup>6</sup> Note that I have used pseudonyms for all informants and changed identifying details to maintain confidentiality.

society, their friendship, religious, and romantic relationships extend beyond the social borders of Latino life” ([14], p. 68). Concerns about Latino assimilation prove unfounded.

The threat articulated in national polls certainly is evident at the local level. For instance, a 2006 poll of rural Nebraskans found strong negative perceptions of Latino immigrants. Only 15 percent agreed that immigration from Latin America has been good for or strengthens rural Nebraska, and only 20 percent believed that rural communities “should communicate important information in Spanish as well as English” ([15], p. 5). In other words, they see immigration as bad for the region and are not inclined to support the full participation of recent immigrants in the life of the community. This perception, regardless of the actual role of immigrants in revitalizing flagging rural communities, shapes the responses of faith communities as well.

### 3. Rural Midwestern Church Responses to Latino Immigration

What are the implications of this demographic change for religious life among Anglos in the rural Midwest? Has the influx of new people in declining communities inspired efforts by churches to think about their religious belief and practice in new ways? To date, there has been relatively little scholarly attention to the religious implications of these changes in the rural Midwest, particularly for the receiving communities.

Certainly, there is a substantial literature addressing new immigration and its religious implications [16–18]. However, almost all of the scholarship on religion and immigration addresses the religious production of immigrants themselves, particularly in urban areas [19,20]. Several recent publications focus on how Christians should respond to immigration issues, providing theological support for particular policy choices, for instance, but little of that literature examines how Anglo religious communities are actually responding, particularly at the congregational level.<sup>7</sup>

Following the publication in 2000 of Michael Emerson and Christian Smith’s *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America*, which highlighted divisions within evangelical Christianity and motivated scholars to think more deeply about multiracial congregations, more and more books and articles on multiracial congregations have been published [21]. Emerson has continued his work on multiracial congregations, developing a typology of multiracial congregations in an article coauthored by Karen Kim Chai and in *People of the Dream: Multiracial Congregations in the United States* with Rodney Woo [22,23]. *People of the Dream* draws on national survey data, hundreds of interviews, and visits to dozens of congregations, providing a very useful broad analysis of multiracial congregations across the country as well as a case study of the congregation Woo leads. Many other recent books, such as Kathleen Garces-Foley’s *Crossing the Ethnic Divide: The Multiethnic Church on a Mission*, are case studies of particular congregations [24]. Some scholars, such as Gerardo Marti in *A Mosaic of Believers: Diversity and Innovation in a Multiethnic Church* and elsewhere, have observed that in many multiracial congregations “ethnic transcendence”, a situation in which “a person’s shared religious identity overrides potentially divisive aspects of ethnic affiliation in considerations of social interaction,” is achieved ([25]; [26], p. 60). Others, such as Korie Edwards in

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<sup>7</sup> Peter Kivisto and Jason Mahn, for example, provide a “sociotheological” analysis of the response to the Postville raid, providing theological support for a response of “radical hospitality” [6]. See also the description of theological responses in Section 4.1 below.

*The Elusive Dream: The Power of Race in Interracial Churches* and elsewhere, have observed the continuing significance of race, arguing that multiracial churches are most likely to remain multiracial when the preferences of white members are prioritized over those of people of color [27,28].

However, few of these books are looking at the particular phenomenon of reaching out to new immigrants or building multiracial congregations in rural areas. Jane Juffer's recent book, *Intimacy across Borders: Race, Religion, and Migration in the U.S. Midwest*, examines rural areas, but through memoir and philosophical reflection rather than sociology or theology [29]. Moreover, few scholars are talking with pastors and laypeople whose efforts are aiming toward greater interaction between ethnic groups but not necessarily resulting in successful multiracial faith communities. Furthermore, most of these studies are focused on Protestant congregations. Brett Hoover's recent book, *The Shared Parish: Latinos, Anglos, and the Future of U.S. Catholicism* is an important exception [30]. He analyzes the development of "shared parishes", a phenomenon in which Anglo Catholics and Latino Catholics belong to the same parish but operate mostly independently, something I observed throughout my study. There are also several case studies of multiethnic Catholic parishes, such as Margaret Kelleher's analysis of how St. Camillus successfully integrated a variety of cultural traditions in its rituals and Kathleen Sullivan's examination of "parallel congregations" at St. Catherine's Catholic Church in Houston [31,32].

One of the reasons that the literature on multiracial churches is not monolithic is that the "multiracial" churches themselves are not uniform. As Marti notes, "Current research treats 'multiracial churches' as a homogenous category; clearly, they are not." They differ in all sorts of ways—where they are located, whether they are big or small, the particular ethnic and racial makeup of the congregation members, the dominant theological tradition, and much more. Moreover, the label does not itself indicate what members of a congregation think or desire with regard to their racial composition. As a result, he argues, "It would be instructive to more finely differentiate between different types of diverse congregations and the processes embedded within them" ([33], p. 15).

This article is an initial response to a specific gap in the literature, asking how predominantly white Christian churches in rural communities receiving immigrants frame and respond to their changing neighborhoods and towns, comparing and contrasting Protestant and Catholic responses and exploring the experiences of congregations that are struggling and not always successful in their attempts to reach out.

### 3.1. Method and Scope

The current study focuses almost exclusively on the dominant group's perspective; it attends primarily to the Anglo Christian response. Certainly, long-time Anglo residents, Latino newcomers, and other recent arrivals all shape the religious life of rural Midwestern towns. The question of how Latino newcomers are actively engaged in shaping the religious life of rural communities is an important one and very much in need of further study. However, I concentrate here primarily on the Anglo community because I believe that understanding the dominant group's responses is an important resource as both Anglos and Latinos strategize for social change, and, up to this point, the Anglo perspective has been relatively absent from scholarship on the religious implications of new immigration.

In order to understand what is taking place, I conducted interviews with church leaders and laypeople throughout Nebraska and Iowa from 2008 to 2010, focusing particularly on those who are intentionally responding to their changing communities. Thirty-two people from twenty congregations and religious institutions, both Roman Catholic and mainline Protestant (including Episcopal, Lutheran, Methodist, and Presbyterian), participated in at least one hour-long interview.<sup>8</sup> All of the congregations were located in Nebraska or Iowa communities with populations less than 30,000; all of the communities had undergone substantial demographic change over the past two decades. I used snowball sampling to find people to interview: I began by talking with denominational leaders, asking which congregations were reaching out, and I asked each person I interviewed who else I should interview.

After approaching several congregations, I engaged in more intensive study in one Catholic parish and one mainline Protestant congregation, attending services, speaking with several congregational leaders at each site, and conducting a congregational survey. The mainline Protestant congregation had an average age older than sixty-five, and, according to the pastor, its membership had been declining for at least the past decade. Approximately seventy people attended the sole worship service each Sunday. The membership was entirely Anglo. The Catholic parish, while majority Anglo, had a sizable, growing, and very active Latino population. The Anglo population in the parish was also aging, though there were a number of families with children. The Latino population, in contrast, was much younger. The parish celebrated five masses each week—four in English and one in Spanish. The English masses I observed were attended by between one hundred and three hundred people, depending on the time; the Spanish masses were attended by between three hundred and four hundred—standing-room only.

I discovered that while both Protestant and Catholic leaders recognize the changing demographics of their communities and are working to respond, Catholic and Protestant responses differ in a number of important ways, both in the strategies they are employing and the prevailing response of congregation members. In the next section I describe what is taking place in congregations, and in the following section I sketch possible reasons for these differences.

### 3.2. Roman Catholic Responses

In the typical Catholic parish, outreach to Latino immigrants is generally straightforward: once a critical mass of interested Spanish-speaking people has gathered in a community, the local priest becomes aware of the Latino community and requests support from the diocese. A Spanish-speaking priest in the area may travel to celebrate Mass monthly. If the need grows, a Spanish-speaking priest may be assigned to the parish. In the three dioceses that cover Nebraska, Spanish-language masses are

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<sup>8</sup> The interviewees include six Catholic laypersons, all Anglo; eight mainline Protestant laypersons, all Anglo; three Catholic priests and three Catholic women religious (all involved in Hispanic ministry), four of the Catholic leaders were Anglo and two were Latino; and twelve mainline Protestant pastors, ten Anglo and two Latino. One interview was conducted in Spanish; the remaining interviews were conducted in English. Throughout the article, I indicate whether the interviewees being quoted are Catholic or mainline Protestant, as well as whether they are laypeople or clergy.

currently celebrated in a total of twenty-two rural parishes, as well as six additional parishes in Lincoln and Omaha [34–36].<sup>9</sup>

The initial impetus is to provide spiritual services for a Catholic population in need of the sacraments and to maintain them within the Catholic Church. Father John, a Catholic priest in a rural parish, explained how the Spanish-language mass was initiated: “The priest [at the time]...just noticed, well, where are the Spanish going to go?...Well, they have to be served by someone, and they are Catholic people, so why not have it here?” Again and again, this was the framework described by Catholic religious leaders: a parish priest became aware of a need as more Latinos arrived in a community; over time the diocese responded with increasing support.

Once Spanish-language masses are in place, the services provided by the parish expand in response to increasing demand. Father John noted, “You put in the Mass, the baptism requests start. The quinceañera requests start, then, ‘I want my kid in catechism.’ The Mass is kind of the initiator.” Sister Ruby, a Catholic woman religious involved in Hispanic ministry at another parish, told me, “The way the church is helping people is, first of all, we’re a church and [we provide] the sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, for them to get married through the church.” Much of the diocesan support is related to faith formation, deepening parishioners’ understanding of Catholicism and developing Latino leaders. These efforts take place in response to Catholic newcomers to the community that church leaders see in need of spiritual support. Father Bill, a priest in another rural parish, said to me, “I do know this, that if we did not have a Spanish Mass, we would not have Hispanics. They would go to other churches; they would be creating their own churches. We have these storefront things going on—there would be a lot more of that. And so you’ve got to, if you want to keep them in the Catholic church, which is ultimately my goal, in a sense, because we think it’s important, we reach out to where they’re at and take them along from there.” His comments emphasize the role of Spanish-language services in retaining Latino Catholics in the faith, a concern intensified by recent Pew Research Center data showing that more than 20 percent of U.S. Latinos raised Catholic have left the tradition ([37], p. 11).

Over time, more opportunities for Spanish-language Latino participation in the parish are offered, beginning with the celebration of occasional Spanish-language masses, moving to providing other sacraments, and resulting eventually in the development of what might be called “parallel” parishes, or “shared parishes”, in which the full range of parish activities take place, including the provision of social services, but separately from the Anglo community that preexisted the influx of new members [30]. As Father John explained to me, “Separate but equal is maybe the best way to say it...It’s a coexistence.” Spanish-language masses are attended almost exclusively by Latino parishioners, with a few Spanish-speaking Anglos scattered in the congregation. In turn, English-language masses are attended primarily by Anglo parishioners, with an increasing number of bilingual Latinos and a few monolingual Spanish-speaking people who find the time of the English mass more convenient.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> In the Roman Catholic Church, parishes are typically organized geographically, with such territorial parishes responsible for all Catholics within the parish boundaries. Individual Catholics sometimes choose to participate in parishes other than the one where they live. However, most of the communities where I interviewed people had only one Catholic parish. A group of parishes is, in turn, located within a geographically bounded diocese.

<sup>10</sup> Sister Mary explained that, at her parish, “Some Hispanics go to the nine o’clock mass in English even though they don’t know English very well. One, because it is more calm, and they appreciate that. Or because the time suits them better.”

Hoover notes, “The shared parish institutionalizes both avoidance and connection. Most parishioners remain in their own cultural world and never have much contact with people from other groups” ([30], p. 2). Most parish activity takes place separately, with separate organizational structures, event calendars, and pastoral support.

There are some important instances of greater interaction, however, and these are remarkably consistent across the parishes I examined. Parish-wide festivals are usually integrated, as people of a variety of cultures enjoy the activities, music, and festivities. Importantly, a variety of cultural groups are represented in the festival booths, not just among those attending the events. Sister Ruby noted that at a recent event in her parish, “We had people galore. [The Anglos] said, ‘Oh, I just love this food.’...And some Anglo ladies would be standing there talking with the other Hispanics, with the ones who knew English, and the ones who didn’t, you know they kinda stood there and they shared [their food]!” Sister Olivia talked about the potlucks and days of recreation sponsored by her parish.

Taylor, an active Anglo Catholic layperson in another parish, told me, “For whatever reason, the Hispanic community largely attends [the parish festival], and they do some of their own booths. And the Anglo community also has a lot of booths and attends it. It is wonderfully mixed! Every year we love to see the elderly community with the kolaches [a Czech pastry] and...the Hispanic community [with their food]; it is just a nice mix.” These festivals, while mentioned by almost every Catholic I interviewed as one of the highlights of cross-cultural interaction, do not always proceed without misunderstandings and cultural differences. Sister Mary noted that the festival in her parish remained mostly segregated one year, as “the Hispanics still would rather be outside because we had music outside, we had a band, but then the Anglos didn’t like that because it was too loud.” The theme of loud music is one that we will encounter again in the Protestant responses.

The experience of the Catholic parishes in Nebraska and Iowa reaching out to Latino newcomers is fully consistent with the national trends that Garces-Foley notes in her analysis of Catholic and evangelical efforts to create multiracial congregations: “After more than a decade of trying to sell the vision of multiculturalism, many parishes still operate as parallel congregations divided along linguistic and cultural lines. Successes at forming cross-cultural bonds have been incremental. Contact occurs through parish-wide events like the annual fiesta fundraiser and multicultural masses often held near feast days like Pentecost” ([38], p. 20). Bilingual masses—on Ash Wednesday, Holy Thursday, and Christmas, among others—also took place in many of the parallel parishes whose priests I spoke with. Similarly, Hoover describes the set of interactions I observed as typical of shared parishes [30].

In the parishes whose leaders I interviewed, religious education classes are another point of interaction, and that has implications for the future (see Section 5). Parishes typically provided only English-language religious education to children. As a result, both Latino and Anglo children were learning together. In contrast, high school youth groups, Marriage Encounter groups, Cursillo groups (a lay leadership retreat program), and other organizations within the parish often operate in parallel. In fact, Brian, a Catholic lay leader involved in youth ministry, described his surprise at discovering that his parish had a completely separate youth group of Latino high schoolers that operated independently of the Anglo youth with whom he had been working.

Efforts to increase interaction between the two groups—something Brian believed was important—is generally supported in words but more rarely with actions. When I asked whether the increased interaction he sought was a widely shared perspective in the parish, Brian explained, “I

would say if you talked to our parish council, they would probably say, yeah, that sounds great, you know, but I don't think that they would be as passionate or as willing to do any kind of work in order to get to that point. Yeah, that's great, a far-fetched dream, not going to happen." Sister Ruby, one of the leaders of Hispanic ministry in another rural parish, said, "We do need [more interaction], and...with the parish council members, there's probably twenty of them, if they and their families would come to those functions, then other persons would come and they'd say 'OK, invite your friends,' and we could get more interaction. So we are constantly working on that." The parish council members think interaction would be nice, but even they themselves do not attend events at which such interaction could take place.

Many Anglo parishioners appreciate the emphasis on ministry to Latinos; others object to it. Sister Mary noted, "It's all across the board:...There are people that are very, very, very happy to have a diverse community and participate when there are activities with the Hispanic community. And we've actually had members of the parish who unfortunately have joined another Catholic parish because they did not like the Hispanic element." Father John said, "Being frank and honest, there was a lot of resentment, a lot of fear. When this church began Spanish mass, and this is pretty typical in other places too, [people said,] 'They're going to come here and take away the church we built!'...Time passes, some bridges are made, some passionate speeches about compassion and sympathy—I think we've now achieved a level of tolerance."

In a very few cases, priests faced outright opposition, as Father Bill described: "I've been attacked by people. As an example, a couple of years ago we were getting ready for first communion, and...the Spanish mass...they were just starting to get out. And there was a lady waiting in the narthex...I never felt such venom in all my all life as I got from her: 'They ought to go to Mexico if they can't do it in English, we're catering to them,' and on and on it goes." At the same time, he noted such a response to be highly atypical: "The other thing that I have to say...is that overall, if there is a prejudice or bigotry, people understand it to be sinful, they don't like it being powerful in their lives, [and they] deal with it by silence." In the case of the priest dressed down by his parishioner, he was actively engaged, both before and after, in parish and citywide efforts to address the needs of recent immigrants. It is particularly important to note that, very much unlike the Protestant examples I will describe in the next section of findings, such opposition never resulted in the removal of a priest, nor did it result in any instance of changing or eliminating services for Latinos.

In general, then, the situation in Catholic parishes tends to unfold as follows: Local priests become aware of a critical mass of Spanish-speaking people, obtain diocesan support for a Spanish-speaking mass, and begin to provide additional sacramental services and religious education. Over time, a predominantly Latino "parallel parish" emerges; the Latino and Anglo communities interact primarily on special occasions or for parish festivals. The Anglo parishioners vary in their response; the overall response is one of tolerance. While many in church leadership would like more interaction between the two groups, they have not implemented clear mechanisms by which that could take place. With that picture in mind, we turn to the Protestant experience.

### 3.3. Protestant Responses

The responses of the mainline Protestant churches attended or led by those I interviewed were more varied than the Catholic responses. Among Protestants, there seem to be two primary and overlapping approaches. One focuses on the social-service needs of recent immigrants, on occasion providing opportunities for the host congregation to learn more about another culture. For instance, in one congregation I examined, English classes are provided through the outreach ministry, often using volunteers from the congregation. The pastor of another congregation engaged in a multiweek Bible study related to immigration issues. A third congregation provided a food and clothing pantry for those in need, reaching out particularly to the Spanish-speaking community. A second approach, which was more common, was to provide or rent space to an immigrant congregation, most of which were Pentecostal.

In every rental situation that was described to me, leaders of small Latino churches, often meeting in people's homes, approached the pastor of a mainline Protestant congregation and asked to use the congregation's building. Several pastors described receiving a number of such requests; many efforts fell apart in the negotiation stages because of problems on either side. The Latino church sometimes found other more suitable space, or the leadership of the Anglo congregation may not have been "primed" for permitting the building to be used. As in the case of some Catholic parishioners, there is sometimes resistance to sharing the church building with newcomers, as Herb, an active member of a mainline Protestant congregation, noted: "When we were first letting them come in and just use the rooms, I think there was some ambivalence, 'Well, this is our church and why are they here?'"<sup>11</sup> He noted that, over time, that sense of concern had dissipated in the congregation. In other instances, people in the Anglo congregation were barely aware of the renting congregation. Pastor Joseph, pastor at a mainline Protestant congregation, said, "People would ask me, 'How's that going? Are they still meeting here?' No, they haven't met for months!" There was a clear disconnection between the Anglo congregation and the Latino congregation renting space. As in the case of the Catholic efforts, congregation members had a range of perspectives on the appropriateness of outreach. As Pastor Emily told me about the congregation she leads, "There are people in the congregation who have wanted to embrace and welcome new people no matter who they are. There are others who have been resistant to any kind of outreach to the Hispanic community, simply because they didn't want to do it." So in some cases there is a sense of concern, in others a lack of awareness, and in yet others a desire to build connections.

Despite the range of perspectives and expressions of support from some congregation members, nearly every Protestant leader with whom I spoke saw outreach efforts as fraught with conflict and resistance. Pastor Chris noted, after learning of resistance at other congregations, "I had to be even more cautious...So I moved very slowly and gently." Pastor Joseph commented, "You are engaging in a risk-taking mission, so you need to know that with your eyes wide open. It is a risk for the pastor...I said [to the church leadership], it's a risk to move us out of our comfort zone, so you need to do this with your eyes open." This fear and recognition of risk was seemingly unique to and ubiquitous in the Protestant congregations.

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<sup>11</sup> The situation in Catholic parishes is somewhat different, of course, as the Anglo Catholics are sharing space with other Catholics who happen to be Latino rather than sharing space with an entirely separate congregation.

Many leaders provided examples of other congregations where pastors had been removed or programs had been terminated, and those experiences affected their own willingness to take risks. Pastor Chris explained that after a recent conflict emerged between the Anglo congregation and the Latino congregation renting space from them, “There was been a lot of backpedaling. You almost wouldn’t know [we had a successful event that connected the two communities]. In our church council meetings there’s been almost an erasing of what happened, and a big backlash against me.” Even when leaders’ jobs were secure, the efforts to reach out to newcomers almost always involved trepidation and concern about alienating congregation members. Pastor Charlie described in some detail the thought process he goes through when judging the risks of speaking out:

You [don’t want to] alienate the members who have the potential to have an impact, a positive impact. You’re out of the game then...I do a lot of thinking: I preached about it last week, do I preach about it next week? Do I preach about it next month?...We’ve made those compromises. There have been occasions where I’ve thought, this would be a perfect text to do this. And I’ve said, no, I can’t do it. You get the feeling they’ll either shut down, “I’m not listening to this anymore.” Or they’ll walk.

The impetus for outreach efforts among Protestants fell into several categories. Some churches reached out to the Latino community because their congregations were struggling to survive. Frequently, Anglo members saw renting space as a way to provide financial support, as the children of aging members (an average age of sixty-six, for instance, in the Protestant congregation I surveyed) move away to the city and few new members join to take their place.<sup>12</sup> In fact, two-thirds of the survey respondents answered an open-ended question about what they would do to improve their church by noting the need for improved finances or increased membership. Thus, efforts to share space are often motivated more by practical survival than by theological mandate. One pastor explained that their decision to offer space for rent was “not born out of goodwill or a desire for mission; it was born of practical necessity.” Another said of her congregation members, “I believe their stance is, ‘If we don’t reach out, our church can’t go on forever.’ But their hearts aren’t in it.” They were happy for the financial support the renting congregation provided, but they were not committed to building connections between the two groups.

In contrast, another group of mainline Protestant churches had a sense of mission that led them to respond to the needs of their changing community. Often, the initial impulse was directed to other countries. Karl, an active Protestant layperson, explained, “Our church has had a strong mission ethic. As a result, we’ve had a program with the youth going down to Mexico for mission trips.” Such mission trips often provided the groundwork for work with Latinos in the United States. Pastor Daniel told me, “In dialogue with the partnership that we had in Honduras, we thought maybe we need to do something or look at something here. So that’s always been kind of been in the background, kind of simmering.” Often those who had gone on mission trips were the most vocal advocates supporting congregational action.

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<sup>12</sup> Jason, an active member of a different mainline Protestant church, described his congregation this way: “We’re 75 percent over fifty. And probably 50 percent over seventy.”

A third impetus for action, which sometimes overlapped with the other two, was denominational suggestion, pressure, or support. Sometimes denominations funded Latino pastors to engage in ministry in a region, and such pastors affiliated themselves with local congregations; sometimes denominations funded staff within particular congregations; sometimes denominations supported the development of community organizations. Such efforts often generated friction in congregations. Pastor Joseph explained, “There were feelings in the congregational leadership that this was something imposed by the denomination, [so] it was quite rough for the first couple of months.” Pastor Daniel explained that the parent denomination had chosen his congregation as a site for Hispanic ministry without a clear understanding among members of what that entailed: “So they designated us as a site for an outreach for the Hispanic community. There then was the original rub, I think, because the congregation thought ‘Oh, that would be nice,’ and [didn’t have a clear] understanding of what Hispanic ministry is.” At least in these instances, there seemed to be some disconnection between the local congregation and the regional or state leaders. In the section below, I will explore the implications of these various motivations on the “success” of the congregational endeavors.

Regardless of which of the three motivations led a congregation to reach out, many of the Anglo congregants, even those positively disposed toward new immigrants, saw Latino immigrants as “other”, as not part of their religious community. Respondent after respondent told me that the Latinos in the community would never be a part of their church. Some, such as Jason, an active layperson, made the argument on the basis of the Latinos’ presumed Catholicism: “We always had people within the congregation saying, ‘Oh, they are going to be Catholic, they’re going to be Catholic. They don’t want to be with us.’” Others focused not on Catholicism but on the Latinos’ presumed worship styles and storefront Pentecostal churches: “My perspective seems to be that the Hispanics have their way of worshipping, and it doesn’t quite jive with what we in the [mainline Protestant denomination] are doing.” Jessica, an active layperson in another congregation, told me, “You can’t attract them; these people they start their own churches. Why would they come to ours rather than start their own?” This “otherness” often hindered outreach efforts. Pastor Chris noted, “The church council has always said, ‘They’ll never be part of our church.’ Or, in other words, why should we care? Why should we help them? They’ll never be part of our church.” Such attitudes could derail efforts, especially for those churches driven by a need for new members.

Opposition to change also thwarted outreach efforts, as Jason observed: “So they, of course, tried to bring in younger people, they had youth programs, that sort of stuff. But there was a tension on the other side from the older congregation, like, we’re not going to change, they should learn to like us like we are, the way we worship, we have traditional service. If they don’t know the liturgy they ought to learn it.” This opposition to change—particularly among groups driven by concerns about the long-term viability of their aging congregations—was acute. Pastor Barbara, who had consulted with a number of congregations undergoing outreach efforts, explained the perspective that many have: “We simply want people to become like us. And when I say like us, I mean the dominant white culture. We are not, as a dominant white culture, interested in shifting any of the rules, regulations, procedures, processes...If you can do it the way we do it, great. If you can’t, fine, it’s nice to have you around, but don’t mess with anything.” Pastor Daniel used almost the same language to describe what he believes his congregants think: “Just give [the Latinos] some space, don’t let them mess anything up or conflict with our schedules, and let them not cost us any money.”

Perhaps as a result of such hesitation and discomfort, interactions between Anglo parishioners and Latino participants in congregations renting space in mainline Protestant churches were very limited and often uneasy. Several of the congregations had attempted collaborative services or communal meals, and they were often plagued by miscommunication and misunderstanding. And the music! Again, as in the case of some Catholic festivals, the music played by the Latino churches, many of them Pentecostal, troubled the sensibilities of older Anglos. As Pastor Emily noted, “The thing about rental space is this is clearly a Pentecostal group, and I’ve had more than one person say, ‘Well, their music is loud and they don’t worship the same way we do.’” Pastor Chris described the way that music intensified complications at a cross-cultural event: “And the music began. And it was through the roof loud...And I couldn’t do anything about it. I went over to the pastor and shouted at the top of my lungs that they needed to turn it down and he couldn’t even hear me, it was that loud. Well, I have ninety-year-old ladies there. I know they blamed me for it.” Such cultural differences often decreased interest in organizing events including both the Anglo and Latino faith communities. I asked Pastor Emily if there had been any interaction between the renting congregation and the host congregation, and she explained, “At this point I don’t know how we could do that. Part of it is that we have some people in our congregation who, who recognize the benefit of the rental money income and resent that we have to take their money to take care of some of our financial needs. So from that point there is no real desire to interact that way.”

Other Protestant congregants and leaders, particularly those whose outreach efforts were driven by a sense of mission, focused on what their Anglo congregation could learn from the congregation renting space. Pastor Emily, whose congregation had little interaction with the congregation that was renting space from them, noted what they were missing: “If mainline churches want to be revitalized, if local congregations that have settled into the rut of being a mirror instead of a light, want to do something different, the example is right here. These people [in the rental congregation] are not theologically trained in terms of theological education and yet you ask them about their faith in God, what they believe about God, they can tell you.” Karl, a congregation member in another town, connected his congregation’s outreach to the ways that both groups benefited: “[Latinos are] God’s people and we have things to learn from them in terms of their sense of mission...Their sense of aliveness to the Spirit and awareness of the Spirit working is something we could use. And [our congregational outreach] is just responding to the needs in a community too. This community has gone in the last thirty years from hardly any Hispanics in the area to being a significant portion of the community.” The sense of mission worked, for him, in both directions.

In sum, Protestant churches vary more than Catholics in their response to the changing demographics of their area. Many rent space to Latino congregations; others provide social services to those in need. In many instances there is widespread consternation among Anglo parishioners, who often accept their congregation’s outreach because of concerns about the eventual demise of their aging congregations or because of denominational pressure. Few interactions take place between the rental congregations and the hosting Anglo congregations, and attempts to interact are often plagued by miscommunication. With the responses of both Catholic parishes and Protestant churches in mind, we turn next to possible explanations of what is taking place.

#### 4. Explanations

Among the churches I studied, Catholic parishes are offering sacraments and other services in Spanish to Latino Catholics in the community, often developing “parallel parishes” in the process. Protestant congregations, in contrast, are hesitantly renting space to independent Latino congregations or providing social services to newcomers in need. How can the differences between Catholic and Protestant approaches best be explained? How can we best explain the resistance that outreach efforts face and the relative lack of interaction between groups?

The differences are not likely based in the ideas that church members have about immigrants. The Catholic and Protestant church members who responded to my congregational survey, for instance, are similar in a number of ways. For instance, when asked whether on balance, immigrants are good for or bad for their community, or whether recent immigrants are trying to make a better life for their children, responses for Protestants and Catholics were nearly identical.<sup>13</sup> Yet what was taking place in their religious communities was not. In other words, the attitudes of laypeople, on their own, do not seem to direct the trajectory of a church’s action. Why not?

In the section below I sketch possible frameworks for thinking about these differences. First, differences in the underlying theology of Protestant and Catholic approaches may lead to differences in results. Second, the prior religious affiliation of Latino newcomers shapes congregations’ strategies. Third, different organizational structures within church bodies mean that Catholic priests and Protestant pastors face different structural constraints that affect their outreach efforts. And, fourth, outreach efforts differ in their initial impetus, which may generate different outcomes.

##### 4.1. Theological Framing

Both mainline Protestant denominations and the Roman Catholic Church have developed theological perspectives on immigration and immigrants. Recent statements about immigration from a range of Protestant denominations frame their analysis by drawing on biblical texts such as Leviticus 19, calling for the foreigner to be treated “as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt” (19:34, NRSV). The theme of migration among biblical characters was noted in a number of the statements I examined, and more than half draw on the parable of the sheep and goats in Matthew 25, in which Jesus compares himself to a stranger seeking welcome.<sup>14</sup> The idea of providing hospitality to foreigners, travelers, and strangers is supported by an

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<sup>13</sup> The median response to whether you think, on balance, that immigrants are good for, or bad for, your community was 2 for both groups, for instance. Importantly, among Catholics, 5 of 17 said they had “close intimate friends who are recent immigrants.” In contrast, only 2 of 24 Protestant respondents said yes to the same question. The median response for frequency of interactions with people who are recent immigrants was daily for Catholics, but only once a week for Protestants. The direction of this relationship is unclear: Did the Catholics encounter more people or become more open because of their participation in the church and its social teachings? This is a topic worthy of further research, as it could certainly inform what is taking place in the parishes.

<sup>14</sup> I reviewed statements from a number of denominations, including Episcopal [39], United Methodist [40], and Evangelical Lutheran Church in America [41], among others. As, for instance, the Episcopalian statement notes, “The infant Jesus and his family had to flee to Egypt to avoid persecution and death; they became refugees, sojourning in Egypt until they could come home. Jesus was a person on the move” [39]. As the ELCA statement notes, highlighting

array of biblical texts, and Protestant books for thinking about and reaching out to immigrants also draw on these ideas. For instance, *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible* has a section titled “The Law and the Sojourner: Guidance for the Old Testament” and another titled “Welcoming the Stranger: Guidance from the New Testament” [42]. Another book has the phrase in its title: *Welcoming the Stranger: Justice, Compassion, and Truth in the Immigration Debate* [43].

In the churches I studied, the call to welcome the stranger often butts up against the ideology of Latino threat I described earlier. One person in an adult education class I visited put it this way: “I know that we are to care for the stranger, but immigrants are wasting my tax dollars in the emergency room and the schools. What am I supposed to do?” Moreover, the idea of “welcoming the stranger” has within it the idea that Latino immigrants are “strangers”—they are not like “us”. As noted earlier, many of the Protestant congregation members told me they believed that the Latinos in their community would never join their church, that they were “different” in ways that created a disconnection. The theological idea of welcoming strangers had a contrary side effect, reinforcing the identity of newcomers as “strangers” and intensifying the idea of difference that many congregation members already held. In other words, the theological idea assumes and reinforces difference, even if inadvertently.

In contrast, the approach of the Catholic churches I visited tended to emphasize both the idea that Latino immigrants were “one of us” and the notion that they were in need. Interestingly, the 2003 pastoral letter by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, titled “Strangers No Longer”, frames the issue somewhat differently from “Welcoming the Stranger among Us”, a resource published three years earlier by the U.S. Catholic Conference [44,45]. The text of the 2003 document, while certainly mentioning biblical passages about hospitality, focuses on a sense of common identity. The first subsection of the letter, for instance, emphasizes “a common history of migration and a shared faith in Jesus Christ.” The bishops speak repeatedly of migrants as “our people”.

The bishops’ letter fits within a long tradition of Catholic social teaching, which some priests brought up in conversation with me. Father Bill, for example, noted, “The Catholic church’s decision to reach out to the Hispanics by having a Spanish Mass, among other things, is not something determined simply locally. We come at it also from the perspective of the social teachings of the church. We’re going to reach out to the poor, the disenfranchised, the marginalized, and Hispanics fit that category now.” He continued by explaining that reaching out was a foregone conclusion—not doing so was not an option: “Whoever comes in will recognize [Hispanic ministry] as part of the puzzle for them. They have to do it; they can’t stop...The bare minimum is sacramental ministry and Mass. By sacramental I mean weddings, baptisms, and getting them ready for confirmation, and then there’s catechesis, religious formation.” The immigrants are perceived as part of the faithful, and the task of the church is to provide support, religious formation, and community. Sister Olivia explained her theological framework to me: “The church that Christ left us so that we can achieve some kind of unity among us, and...all these groups are allowed to exist to build up the kingdom of God. That is the

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the continuity between refugee resettlement in the 1970s and today’s immigration, “The leaders and congregations that have given us this legacy [of hospitality] remind us that hospitality for the uprooted is a way to live out the biblical call to love the neighbor in response to God’s love in Jesus Christ...They direct us to where Jesus said he is present: ‘I was a stranger and you welcomed me’ (Matthew 25: 35)” [41].

ultimate reality that we Catholics would hope to achieve.” “Reaching out” presumes a common identity, even if unity has not yet been achieved.

While there is a desire, perhaps not fully actualized, to increase interaction between Anglos and Latinos, to build the unity Sister Olivia sought, many Catholics see the “shared parish” model as itself valuable—and perhaps superior to immediate and full integration. Father Benjamin explained to me, “In some respects, the fact that you’re serving people in their language is an integrating factor. Some people think that’s a separation, you should force everybody to go to the English [mass], but that’s really cultural domination. You are saying, what you grew up with is not good enough for us. But if you accept them in their own language group, then they feel comfortable, and then you can build bridges in other areas.” In other words, parallel parishes might prevent, or at least attenuate, one of the key problems that many scholars have identified in some multiracial congregations: the domination of congregational culture and practice by one group, generally white people (see, for example [27,28]).

Father Benjamin’s understanding parallels Garces-Foley’s argument in her analysis of Catholic and evangelical approaches to multiracial congregations. She asks, “If these [Catholic] parishes operate as parallel congregations, do they really count?” She contends that, according to the underlying theology driving the approach, the answer is yes. Her argument is that “the Catholic approach is based on the principles of inculturation and hospitality. Consequently, Catholic integration efforts start and end with the assumption that new immigrants must be allowed to retain their religiocultural traditions and worship in their own language. When seen in this light, the persistence of cultural divisions within the multicultural parish is evidence of success rather than failure” ([38], p. 21). In other words, permitting people to worship God in familiar ways demonstrates respect for people’s particular cultural identities and practices rather than being a sign that integration efforts have not succeeded.

Thus, one possible explanation of the differences between Catholic and Protestant outreach efforts relates to the theology underlying their approaches. Protestant traditions often focus on “welcoming the stranger”, which may reinforce preexisting perceptions that Latino newcomers are “outsiders” and not likely to participate fully in the religious life of mainline Protestants, leading to halting and inconsistent efforts to reach out to them. In contrast, the Catholic tradition, while recognizing the biblical mandate to welcome the stranger, emphasizes both that Catholic Latinos are “one of us” and that they bring with them a set of important religious and cultural traditions. Such an understanding leads to inclusion of Latino Catholics within parallel parishes.

#### *4.2. Prior Religious Affiliation*

Seeing Latino newcomers as “one of us” or as “strangers” is not only a theological construction; it is also based in the prior religious affiliation of Latinos. This is another social-structural constraint that shapes the direction and effectiveness of outreach efforts. While the number of Latinos who identify as Catholic has been decreasing over past decades, a Pew Research Center survey from 2013 found that among Hispanic adults in the United States, 55 percent identify as Roman Catholic while only 22 percent identify as Protestant. Moreover, of those who identify as Protestant, three times more identify as evangelical (16 percent of total Hispanic adults) than as mainline (5 percent of total Hispanic adults) ([37], p. 5).

These numbers, by themselves, are an important factor shaping the strategies congregations have taken. For instance, mainline Protestant congregations are unlikely to find many Latino newcomers in their community who are already affiliated with their tradition. As a result, reaching out to participants in other, often Pentecostal traditions is a more likely course. The relative dearth of Latino mainline Protestants also makes it more difficult for mainline Protestant outreach efforts to be successful, as there are no preexisting religious ties between the newcomers and the Anglo congregations.

In contrast, Catholics have a numerical advantage. More than half of Hispanic adults are already affiliated with the Catholic Church, providing preexisting religious ties between the newcomers and the Anglo parishes. Moreover, the geographical structure of Catholic parishes means that each parish is responsible for providing the sacraments to Catholics within its geographical boundaries. This responsibility, in conjunction with the influx of Latinos who are Catholic, explains why Catholic parishes often begin by providing sacraments (as it is the responsibility of the parish to do so) and why such efforts lead to participation in the parish by Latinos (as the participants have preexisting connections to the tradition).

#### 4.3. *Voluntarism and Organizational Structure*

Prior religious affiliation is not the only social-structural variable influencing how churches respond. Differences in polity and organizational structure between mainline Protestant traditions and Roman Catholicism likely also have a significant effect on the strategies congregational leaders employ and their chances of success.

Because people voluntarily participate in their faith communities, they can likewise choose to leave those communities when conflict arises (see, for example, the essays in [46]). This reality constrains pastors, as Jeffrey Hadden noted forty years ago in *The Gathering Storm in the Churches*, a study of clergy responses to the civil rights movement [47]. As he notes, “The leader must operate within the boundaries of his prescribed role as leader. To deviate beyond the role prescriptions of his office is to invite conflict with the membership” ([47], p. 29). While the pastors Hadden studied had consistently more progressive perspectives on civil rights than their parishioners, they enacted those perspectives in differing ways, depending on their social position—depending on their “prescribed role”.

For instance, a group of clergy participating in a training program had the opportunity to participate in civil rights protests in Chicago. Nearly all began participating, yet whether they stayed and were arrested depended on their “structural position”. Among clergy of inner-city integrated congregations, all were arrested. Among clergy working in nonparish settings, such as denominational offices, 78 percent were arrested. Yet among suburban clergy, only 10 percent were arrested. Hadden exclaims, “We were not able to determine any significant differences in attitudes toward civil rights of those who were arrested and those who were not arrested!” ([47], p. 167). The differences did not have to do with different understandings of the need for civil rights; instead, they had to do with the perceived expectations of the pastors’ constituencies. As he examined suburban pastors thinking about engaging in civil rights activism, Hadden concluded that they avoided involvement in situations “that *might* be upsetting to their congregation” ([47], p. 171; emphasis in original). In other words, the actions of clergy were influenced mostly strongly not by their value commitments but by the attitudes of their congregation members.

What Hadden observed is similar in important ways to what I have observed. There is a tendency toward caution among those leaders in the most tenuous structural situations: aging and declining mainline Protestant congregations. This caution is linked both to perceived resistance on the part of their parishioners and on real evidence of pastors being removed from their positions when they reached out in ways that made their congregations uncomfortable. What I heard from pastors echoes Hadden's caution in a discussion of school desegregation in Little Rock: "If the minister goes against the expectations of his congregations and takes a strong stand for desegregation, he faces the possibility of losing members from his congregation, financial resources, and even his job" ([47], pp. 186–87). Pastor Barbara made the point explicitly: "I think in many ways as leaders we're scared to death to say that Jesus would hold us accountable [for our response to our new neighbors]...because if we say that, we're going to have major challenges on the part of folks who sit in the pews on Sunday morning, because that is clearly not where they are at." As noted in the section on Protestant responses, many pastors were worried about the effect of their actions and thought carefully about how to find a way bring their understanding of the Christian message to bear on changing communities without alienating their parishioners.

In contrast, this same concern was not expressed by any of the Catholic priests or women religious. Not one. The lack of concern was not because Catholic parishioners were uniformly in favor of more Latinos in their parishes. As noted earlier, some were vehemently opposed. Rather, the organizational structure of the Catholic Church meant that priests and women religious could speak out in support of Catholic teaching, even if controversial, without fear of reprisal, as their job security depends on the bishop rather than parishioners' approval. Taylor, a Catholic layperson, described the structure of decision making in the parish: "Really, the parish council exists as a soundboard for the priests. So, Father comes with a list of things that he is thinking about doing or whatever, and then he asks for our opinion and we give it, and then he makes the decision. And it's very clear that the Catholic Church's difference from the other churches is that there's a leader, and that person makes the decisions and everybody follows or leaves. That's kind of all the way down, the realities of how the church is governed." He continued, "Priests don't have to worry about people leaving to go somewhere else. At the same time, though, the Catholic Church doesn't typically make decisions worrying about whether people will leave. That's the reality of the church. You never feel like you can take out a priest. You don't." In rural Nebraska and Iowa, there is usually only one parish in each town, making moving to another parish less likely.

As a result, Catholic priests seem to feel safer in promoting Catholic social teaching, celebrating Mass, and providing other sacraments to Latino immigrant Catholics, regardless of the perspectives of their Anglo parishioners. In fact, the priest who described facing a highly critical parishioner showed me, just after telling the story, a pro-immigrant statement that he helped draft for publication. In contrast, Protestant pastors often feel precariously situated, recognizing that too strong an emphasis on reaching out to Latinos may alienate Anglo parishioners and threaten both the pastor's job and the stability of the congregation.

#### 4.4. Impetus for Outreach

The experiences of the congregations I studied also seem to illustrate hypotheses that Michael Emerson and Karen Chai Kim propose about the relationship between the impetus for starting multiracial congregations and their eventual success [22]. Their typology of multiracial congregations is based on what leads a congregation to reach out to other racial and ethnic groups and where the new members come from. The congregations I am studying, especially the mainline Protestant congregations, are not yet multiracial, but they are reaching out to new groups, and at least some of them have the goal of eventually incorporating Latino newcomers into their congregation. Even for those who do not seek immediately to become multiracial, I believe that Emerson and Kim's model can provide fruitful insight into their efforts. While demographic changes provided a source of potential members from other racial and ethnic groups for all of the congregations I studied, the congregations embodied all three of the initial reasons for outreach that Emerson and Kim described: movement toward a multiracial congregation can take place in response to a congregation's mission, in response to increased or decreased resources, or in response to a denominational mandate.

Some of the congregations I studied reached out because of a desire for their church to survive. When I asked Herb, a mainline Protestant layperson, if his church should engage in outreach, he responded bluntly, "Absolutely. If they're here, and we want to keep our church open and solvent, we need to reach out, absolutely." This fits into what Emerson and Kim call the "Survival Embracing" category: churches that reach out to a changing community in order to survive. Other congregations reached out to a changing community because of a sense of mission. Certainly this was true of the Catholic parishes, whose mission included providing the sacraments to Catholics in the area. It was also true of some Protestant congregations. For instance, Karl explained that his church had a "strong mission ethic", and, as a result, many people in the congregation were excited about the possibility of providing space to a Latino congregation. Such churches fit into the "Neighborhood Embracing" category. A few others straddled the divide between these two categories and the "Mandated" category, in which multiracial churches are a response to denominational pressure.

Emerson and Kim argue that some categories are more likely to be successful than others in generating viable multiracial congregations. For instance, they note, "Although all multiracial churches face forces that make them at risk for instability, our research suggests that the *Mandated* multiracial church faces even more initial risk. This is due to the source of the change coming from outside the congregation, sometimes producing resistance within the congregation" ([22], p. 224). As noted earlier, that was the case among some of the rural Nebraska and Iowa congregations whose denominations were pushing them to reach out. Emerson and Kim also hypothesize that churches acting in order to survive are less likely to be successful than those acting from a sense of mission. They write, "Congregations that mainly draw their diversity out of their culture and purpose will be more likely to sustain their multiracial composition" ([22], p. 225). Their argument has primarily to do with the broader geographical area from which mission-driven churches draw their congregants. However, I believe that acting from a sense of mission also provides a more long-lasting and committed approach than acting primarily from a defensive position of survival. As Jason, a Protestant layperson, explained, his congregation had "gone to survival mode". Because of this, they have a

mentality of “Oh, we’re going to close? Yes, then we will try this.” The action emerges not from a desire for interaction but from a fear of loss.

George Yancey, drawing on the same data as Emerson, provides a different typology, based on leadership, evangelism, demography, and social networks [48]. The category most relevant in this context has to do with demographic change. Yancey found that for both Catholic churches and mainline Protestant churches, “a changing racial neighborhood” was the key factor leading them to become multiracial, as in the cases I examined ([48], p. 57). Interestingly, Yancey explains, “the Lilly research indicates that members of Demographic multiracial churches were less likely to develop close friendships with other members of their church in general, and with members of other races within their church specifically” ([48], p. 57). As noted earlier, the congregations I examined seemed to fit this profile. They developed because of changing neighborhoods, and their members struggled to build cross-cultural relationships.

Thus, the typology of multiracial congregations provided by Emerson and Kim, and the further analysis by Yancey, can help explain which of the churches I visited are most likely to persist in their outreach efforts. All of the churches I examined are responding to demographic change, which, in Yancey’s analysis, makes them less likely to foster significant cross-racial and cross-cultural relationships within the community. Among those congregations, those responding to denominational pressure or acting in order to survive, to sustain declining membership, are more likely to struggle than those who are reaching out as part of their mission as a congregation.

## 5. What Does the Future Hold?

What does all of this mean for the future of congregations in rural Nebraska and Iowa? I found many instances of aborted efforts to reach out among Protestants, and I saw demographically multiracial Catholic parishes in which little interaction takes place. While communities are changing quickly, churches are moving more slowly. This is only a snapshot of one moment in time in one region of the country. Over time, however, both churches and communities will continue to change, and hints at future transitions are already visible. Let me briefly sketch three variables. First, second-generation Latinos have a different set of interests and preferences than their parents. Second, some Protestant congregations are building deeper connections with their rental congregations. And, third, community connections may prove as important, if not more important, than church connections.

First, as time passes, the makeup of the Latino population in the rural Midwest will change. Already, following the 2008 recession, migration from Mexico and Central America has slowed.<sup>15</sup> And the children of Latinos who moved to Nebraska and Iowa a decade ago are growing up. Second-generation Latinos have a different set of religious and linguistic practices. A 2013 study by the Pew Research Center found that among Latinos, there was a drop from 79 percent among first-generation immigrants to 48 percent among second-generation Latinos of those who said “most or all the services they attended in the past year were in Spanish” ([37], p. 79). Emerson and Woo note a dramatic shift in preferences from uniracial congregations among foreign-born Latinos to interracial congregations

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<sup>15</sup> According to the title of a recent Pew Research Center report, using data from 2011, “Net Migration from Mexico Falls to Zero—and Perhaps Less”, though data from 2012 indicates that with an improving economy in the United States, migration may again increase, though more slowly than in the past [49,50].

among their US-born children, which they argue “suggests rapid assimilation, acculturation, or a strong desire to avoid ethnic congregations for the second and further generations of Hispanics” ([23], p. 87). As more and more newcomers to the rural Midwest attend English-language services, interaction between Anglos and Latinos will inevitably increase, and the shared parishes will change. The precise mechanisms of such change will have to await future study. R. Stephen Warner, Elise Martel, and Rhonda Dugan note in their study of second-generation Latinas that “the mostly Catholic Latinas express deep ambivalence about their religious identity but find it nearly impossible to disentangle it from their more valued cultural identity” ([51], p. 46). This deeply rooted cultural identity among second-generation Latinas, and its connection to Catholic practice, makes it likely that Catholic practice among second-generation Latinos in the rural Midwest will not simply be an acceptance of Anglo practices along with English-language services.

Second, some Protestant churches are beginning to build relationships with the congregations that rent from them. This process clearly is a lengthy one, but there are glimpses of unexpected connections between the two. For instance, despite great difficulty in building relationships between congregation members, some Latinos in the congregation renting space from Pastor Chris’s mainline Protestant church expressed interest in learning more about the polity and practices of the mainline tradition. He explained that after having a series of conversations with church leaders of the rental congregation, “They are even having the congregation choose their next slate of officers, which is not a Pentecostal approach. So who knows where that is going to go.” In addition, Karl noted that in his mainline Protestant congregation “the goal is to have [the renting] congregation—if they wanted to be—they could be members [of the host congregation] also.” Whether these initial steps will bear fruit remains to be seen, as does whether such efforts will maintain the imbalance of power between the groups. Here, too, the future is uncertain, as in some cases rental congregations have grown to hundreds of people, many times the size of the declining congregations from whom they are renting space.

Third, it is important to remember that relationships are not limited to religious life. Based on my interviews, it is clear that many relationships between Anglos and Latinos are being built outside of the church community—at work, at school, with neighbors, during athletic events, and so on. Many laypeople who noted few interactions with Latinos at church told me about friendly relationships with their Latino neighbors, coworkers, and friends. Jessica, an older Anglo Protestant layperson who had explained to me that Latinos would never join her church, described spending time talking with her Latino neighbors who had offered to help shovel her snow, concluding, “They make life kind of interesting in a way. I like that there are a bunch of kids around.” Herb, another Anglo Protestant layperson, spoke of the bravery required for recent immigrants to move so far from home, and he described the friendships he had developed with the parents of some of his children’s Latino friends at the high school.

Church may be a place to hold onto culture more tightly, and so transformative relationships may occur there more slowly than elsewhere. Father John explained to me why people in his parish might go to the mass emerging from their own culture: “[The music in the English-speaking Mass] is slow with an organ, while the Spanish lively with the guitar. Sociologically, religion is comforting. I have a God that is supposed to be watching over me. I can hear the tunes I know from my home country. Despite us not fostering religion as a nation, the military has salaried chaplains, because there’s a tranquility that comes from, I’ve got my preacher here. It does a sociological good to those who care

for it.” In other words, as another priest noted as well, in moments of intense cultural and community change, holding onto familiar religious traditions may provide a foundation from which people can more effectively reach out to their neighbors in other ways.

## 6. Conclusions

The rural Midwest has undergone substantial demographic change over the last two decades. While current literature on immigration has examined the religious production of immigrants, less attention has been paid to the response of religious communities in the receiving communities. Other research has looked at efforts to build multiracial congregations, but little attention in that literature has been paid to rural areas. The current study, which focuses on the response of Anglo Christians in towns in the U.S. Midwest with growing immigrant populations, takes one step toward filling that gap.

Both mainline Protestant congregations and Catholic parishes in towns across Nebraska and Iowa have reached out to Latino newcomers, but they have done so in differing ways and with differing results. Catholic parishes have begun Spanish-language masses and developed “shared parishes” in which both Anglo and Latino parishioners receive the sacraments and participate in parish life, but do so in “parallel,” with little interaction outside of bilingual masses on holidays and parish festivals. In contrast, Protestant churches, often declining and struggling to survive, have responded in a variety of ways, with some providing social services and others providing space to Latino congregations that are often Pentecostal. The Protestant responses have generated much more resistance among congregation members.

There are a number of possible theories to explain what I have observed. First, Protestant and Catholic efforts emerge from differing theologies. Second, the prior religious affiliation of Latino newcomers means that Catholic churches have a natural connection with many recent immigrants that mainline Protestant churches do not. Third, the organizational structure and polity of the Catholic Church differs from the organizational structure and polity of mainline Protestants, leading Protestant pastors to face greater resistance and possible removal by unhappy congregants. Fourth, congregations that are facing denominational pressure or are acting defensively to survive are likely to be less successful than those acting in response to a deeply rooted sense of congregational mission. Of course, there are insufficient data here to determine which of these possible explanations is most likely or plays a greater role in the phenomena under discussion. Moreover, communities and congregations are in flux, and outreach efforts will continue and people will build relationships in the broader community over time, leaving open the need for further research, particularly of the interaction between Anglos and Latinos and of Latino agency in shaping the religious life of rural communities.

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### Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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