

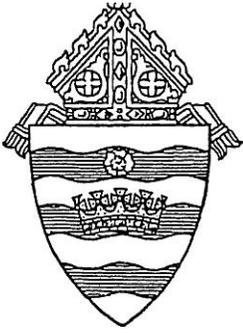
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**GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS**  
**For Religious Education and Sacramental Preparation**  
**With the Hispanic Community of the**  
**Archdiocese of Atlanta**

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**Our Lady  
of Guadalupe**



## Archdiocese of Atlanta

December 12, 2001

Dear Catechetical Leaders,

In 1987, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops of the United States published a document entitled the *National Pastoral Plan For Hispanic Ministry*. The document takes into account the reality of the burgeoning Hispanic population of this country, and offers strategies so that Hispanics may achieve integration and incorporation into the life of the U.S. Church. In the midst of pluralism, it describes the challenge placed in front of all of us:

*By integration we mean that our Hispanic people are to be welcomed to our church institutions at all levels. They- are to be served in their language when possible, and their cultural values and religious traditions are to be respected. Beyond that, we must work toward mutual enrichment through interaction among all our cultures. (no.4)*

The Religious Education Advisory Committee for Hispanics, also known as the REACH Committee, has accepted this ongoing challenge in many ways, including the creation of the following *General Recommendations for Religious Education and Sacramental Preparation with the Hispanic Community of the Archdiocese of Atlanta*. The principle objective of these recommendations is to offer general information, in a concise manner, about some pertinent characteristics of Hispanic cultures, and then to offer some recommendations in the field of Religious Education based on these characteristics.

Those on the REACH Committee 2000-2001 responsible for the creation of these recommendations include Rev. Jose Duvan Gonzalez; Rev. Fernando Molina-Restrepo; Nilsa Cintron; Carmen Desmelik; Sr. Xenia Gonzalez, MAG; Sr. Marietta Jansen, ACJ; Sr. Ines Ramos, MAG; Luisa Ruiz; Sr. Maria Jesus Sagasetta, ACJ; and myself.

Our hope is that these recommendations will assist all clergy and laity involved in the catechetical process to work towards fulfilling the goals of the *National Pastoral Plan For Hispanic Ministry* in the field of Religious Education.

If you have any questions or comments about these recommendations, please do not hesitate to contact me at (404) 885-7413 or e-mail [pvil1acres@archatl.com](mailto:pvil1acres@archatl.com).

On this feast day of Our Lady of Guadalupe, we are reminded that our God is the God of all peoples. May God bless your continual efforts to serve the myriad of all God's people in the Church.

Cordially in Christ,

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Pamela Villacres

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# I.

## The Hispanic Presence in the U.S. and North Georgia

Spanish explorers were the first Europeans to set foot on Georgian soil back in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Five hundred years later the Hispanic presence in North Georgia is growing dramatically. According to *Walking Together: The Hispanic Pastoral Plan of the Archdiocese of Atlanta* (p. 4-7), the first organized Hispanic group of the Diocese of Atlanta, the Hispanic Catholic Action (*La Acci6n Hispanoamericana -ACHA*), was established in 1960, and the first Mass in Spanish was celebrated in May, 1961 at the Immaculate Conception Church. Over 40 years later, almost half of the parishes and missions in the Archdiocese of Atlanta celebrate Mass in Spanish on a regular basis, and/or have an active Hispanic Ministry Office or Committee. The numbers published by the recent census give us an idea of why so many of our parishes now include large and/or growing Hispanic communities.

The Census 2000 conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, which can be accessed at [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov), indicates that for the first time in the history of the U.S., **the Black or African American population has been surpassed by the Hispanic or Latino population as the country's largest minority.** Census 2000 results indicate that African Americans make up 12.3 % of the U.S. population, whereas **Hispanics now make up 12.5% of the U.S. population.** Of that 12.5%, the largest group is Mexican with 7.3%, and the next largest group is Puerto Rican with 1.2%.

One of the reasons for this is that the rate of growth for Hispanics is greater than it is for any other race or ethnic group. From 1990 to 2000, the overall increase in the U.S. population was 13.2 %. Yet, **the Hispanic population increased by 57.9%**, whereas the African American population, for example, increased by 16.2%. The white race increased by only 3.4%.

Of all the Hispanics in the nation, 32.8% live in the southern United States, and account for 11.6% of the population in the South.

Georgia has the 10<sup>th</sup> largest population of all the states in the U.S., but it is ranked 6<sup>th</sup> in percent population change, after Nevada, Arizona, Colorado, Utah, and Idaho. From 1990 to 2000, Georgia's population increased by 26.4%

The metropolitan area of Atlanta is ranked 11<sup>th</sup> in the country for its population of 4,112,198 inhabitants. That's an increase of 38.9% since 1990.

Out of 8,186,453 people in Georgia, 435,227, or 5.3% of the population, are Hispanic.

The growth of the Hispanic population in the metro Atlanta area has been greater than any other racial or ethnic group. Of the many counties in the metro Atlanta area, Pickens County appears to have the greatest growth rate of the Hispanic population with an increase of 915.2% since 1990. Next is Forsyth County with an increase of 762.5%, Gwinnett County with an increase of 657.2%, Cherokee County with an increase of 626.6%, and Coweta County with an increase of 626.5%.

Having summarized the Census numbers, it is important to remember that there was a net national undercount of 1.2% of the population, or 3.3 million people, and it is surmised that most of those involved in the undercount were minorities

Since over 65% of U.S. Hispanics consider themselves Catholic, the growing number of Hispanics is having, and will continue to have a profound impact on the Catholic Church in the United States. Ronaldo Cruz, Executive Director of the USCCB Secretariat for Hispanic Affairs, states that "about 71 percent of Catholic growth in the United States since 1960 is due to the Hispanic presence" (*Catholic Trends, A Publication of the Catholic News Service*). The metro area of Atlanta certainly reflects that since 1970, the Catholic denomination has grown more than any other denomination, with **an** increase of 483%. The next largest increases in membership in the metro Atlanta area belong to the Jewish Synagogues, with an increase of 154%, and the Assemblies of God, with an increase of 104% (*Atlanta Journal Constitution*).

According the USCCB Secretariat for Hispanic Affairs, in the year 2000 Hispanics made up 26.5 percent of the U.S. Catholic Church. Other groups within the Church include the Non-Hispanic Caucasians who make up 65.5%, African Americans who make up 4%, the Asian population that makes up 3.5%, and Native Americans, who make up 0.5% of the Church. Since U.S. Census data reveals a Hispanic growth rate that is five times that of non-Hispanics, and also that the Hispanic population in the U.S. is young (over 50% is less than 26 years old), the Secretariat for Hispanic Affairs concludes that **it is very likely that by 2010, the Catholic Church in the U.S. will be over 50 percent Hispanic** (Demographics at [www.nccbuscc.org/hispanicaffairs/demosp.htm](http://www.nccbuscc.org/hispanicaffairs/demosp.htm)).

The Archdiocese of Atlanta is representative of the entire U.S. as a "nation of immigrants" in its diversity of national ethnic origins of peoples. There are three main characteristics of our Hispanic population in the U.S. that will help the Church to welcome and serve them.

First, the USCCB in its recent document *Unity in Diversity: Welcoming the Stranger Among Us* reminds us that "though a good number come as skilled workers and professionals, the greater number come as refugees and immigrants on the edge of survival; large numbers join families here; others arrive without proper documents" (p.1).

Second, Ronald Cruz, executive director of the USCCB's Secretariat for Hispanic Affairs, informs us that "In 1980, 80 percent of all U.S. Hispanics were born in the U.S., but today about half were born elsewhere" (*Catholic Trends: A Publication of the Catholic News Service*).

Third, many Hispanic immigrants are young adults who come in search of work, and so whereas the median age for the U.S. population as a whole is 35.3 years, it is 25.9 years for the Hispanic population. The youngest median age among Hispanics themselves is 24.2 years for the Mexican population.

To summarize, the Hispanic population has grown explosively in the last 10 years and will continue to grow dramatically in this country. Recently, many have come in desperation, looking for better means of survival than what they find in their countries of origin. It is a young population, struggling to work hard to survive in a foreign land in the midst of a strange culture and having to learn a new language. We are encouraged by the U.S. Bishops to "... help them join our communities in ways that are respectful of their cultures and in ways that mutually enrich the immigrants and the receiving Church" (*Unity in Diversity: Welcoming the Stranger Among Us*, p.2).

## II.

### **General Summary of Surveys sent to Hispanics in PSR programs, 2001**

In May 2001, questionnaires were sent out to the Hispanic adults involved, or who have children involved, in the Religious Education programs in Spanish in the parishes of the Archdiocese of Atlanta. The Office of Hispanic Lay Ministry Formation (formerly the Office of Hispanic Catechesis) received over 200 responses back from seven parishes/missions. A brief general summary of the results of the questionnaires is as follows:

The majority of those Hispanics who responded to the questionnaires prefer that their children be taught in the R.E. programs in Spanish. The main reasons given were to preserve the culture and language, and also so that the parents are able to understand, share, and help their children with what they are learning.

The majority responded that they have their children attend Religious Education classes in their own parishes, since it is available, rather than having to go to other parishes.

The majority responded that their children do indeed continue attending the PSR even after receiving First Communion. However, a large number also responded that their children do not, because they didn't know they had to, or they live too far away from the parish, or they don't have transportation, or they don't have enough time.

Most adults who responded do not attend any continuing education classes for themselves. The reasons given were that they were not aware of any offered, or they don't have time, or they don't have transportation, or that there are no programs available for adults in Spanish at the parish.

Although not the majority, a great number mentioned that had fallen away from the Church at some point in their lives, and the main reasons were because of work or lack of personal transportation. Other reasons included because there was no Mass in Spanish available, or out of laziness, or because they had some problem with the Church or with a priest.

There were many different suggestions for improving catechesis in Spanish in the parishes. The main suggestions were to provide more formation for parents and catechists, since "by helping our children, we are also catechized".

*For more information concerning these surveys, please contact Pamela M. Vilacres in the Department of Religious Education at (404) 885-7413.*

### III.

## General Characteristics of Hispanic Culture

Although within the Hispanic population there are in reality many cultures, depending on many factors including the country of origin (i.e., a Cuban is different from a Mexican, who is different from a Colombian, etc.), nevertheless, below is a brief list of some general traits that seem to apply to Latin American culture in general.

### Cultural Preservation

- Hispanics tend to value highly the preservation of their language. Language expresses the core, the spirit, of a people. Hispanics have a paramount need to hear and speak their faith in Spanish. In his Pastoral Letter *When I Was A Stranger*, Archbishop John F. Donoghue quotes the Vatican document *Instruction: Inculturation and the Roman Liturgy*, which states,

The missionary tradition of the Church has always sought to evangelize people in their own language. And this is right as it is by the mother tongue which conveys the mentality and the culture of a people, that one can reach the soul, mold it in the Christian spirit and allow to share more deeply in the prayer of the Church.

- There are frequently different levels of language proficiency among members of the same family. Many times the children who are in school all day become proficient in English much more quickly than their parents or grandparents do.
- Hispanics, especially recent immigrants, also tend to resist acculturation, preferring to maintain their language and cultural and religious traditions that form their identity.

### Social and Economic Status

- Because most Hispanics come from developing countries where public education, health care and other basic services tend not to be a priority, many Hispanic immigrants arrive in the U.S. with very little academic background but with a strong desire to work hard to make their lives better for themselves and for their families.
- In 1995, 53.7% of Hispanic adults 25 years old or more in the U.S. had graduated from high school. 9.3% had obtained a university degree.
- The average annual income of the Caucasian race in the U.S. is \$31,231. For Hispanics, the average income is \$22,330, or 39.9% less. In 1990, 13.1% of the general population lived below the poverty line, yet among Hispanics, 25.3% lived below the poverty line. (See these and more Demographics at [www.nccbuscc.org/hispanicaffairs/demosp.htm](http://www.nccbuscc.org/hispanicaffairs/demosp.htm))

- For many reasons, including poverty and differences in culture, most first generation Hispanic immigrants are probably not accustomed to giving much during the Offertory, nor are they accustomed to using envelopes since they are not typically used in Latin America. Yet, the Hispanic population is known for its warm hospitality and personal generosity.

## **Relationships/Communication Styles**

- Familial and communal ties (solidarity!) are strong for Hispanics. Extended family and *compadres* (godparents or sponsors) play a central role in their daily religious and social lives. For example, a typical U.S. Anglo may see Baptism as a purely religious ceremony, but for most Hispanics, Baptism is also a social and family event that has the potential to create new relationships that may benefit the baptized and/or the family of the baptized. The network of relationships that is developed because of one's religious affiliation really has no equivalent in mainstream American Catholicism.
- Hispanics believe strongly in parental authority, and tend to be more patriarchal than the dominant Anglo culture.
- Hospitality is highly valued. Even the poorest Hispanics will offer you what little they have.
- Hispanics tend to have a different communication style than the dominant U.S. culture. The dominant culture tends to have a communication style which is more **low-context**, meaning the words or verbal instructions can stand on their own, and are not dependent on their context. Hispanic communication, by contrast, tends to be more **high-context**, meaning that the spoken word does not communicate nearly as much as the context of the word does. Context may refer to the myriad of non-verbals associated with speech, including speed, tone, emphasis, facial and bodily movements, silences, distance between speakers, body contacts, and attention span.

In other words, whereas mainstream U.S. culture's style is more direct and concise, Hispanics language is indirect, digressive, and more subjective. For example, among Hispanics, a conversation may start with inquiring about one's family and work, rather than the matter at hand. Greetings and courtesies are central to communication among Hispanics, and conversations among acquaintances, for example, tend to be more warm and personal (See *The Wolf Shall Dwell With The Lamb* by Eric Law for more discussion of the communication differences among cultures and peoples).

## Teaching/Learning Style

- The learning style of Hispanics is unique. They tend to be field sensitive learners rather than field independent. "Field sensitive learners prefer a warm supportive teacher; collaborative projects and group competition; clear directions and modeling; issues with practical applications for experience; generalizations; rewards that enhance the person or strengthen teacher/pupil relations; close relationships with teachers and advisers. In contrast, the field independent learners prefer a formal and serious teacher; projects involving individual competition and developed individual efforts; principles and laws underlying issues that lead to conceptualization; individual elements of a problem and from these to generalizations; material rewards; passive relations with teachers and advisers." (*Adult Religious Education for the Hispanic Community*, p. 28-29)
- Hispanics have a *polychronic* concept of time, vs. *monochronic*. For them, time can easily be extended, and many things can occur at any one time. They tend to live in the moment, not worrying or planning for the future.

## Faith and Religion

- Faith and religion tend to play a central role in Hispanics' daily lives. General characteristics of Hispanic spirituality include:

An awareness of the presence of God in daily life

A desire to share and celebrate together

A sense that life is a journey, and we are searching for a place with no sorrows

Trust in the providence of God, and endless patience in times of misfortune

A fatalistic view of human's ability to control and transform their environment

An unquestioning submission toward religious authority, especially clergy

Strong communities

Respect for elders and authorities

Gratitude to God for the gifts of life and health

Option for the poor, especially for those to whom one is linked in a personal way

Awareness of sin and the need to repent

Respect and remembrance of the dead

Belief in the Christ who is king and servant.

- On the whole, Hispanics are not Churchgoers. In part this is probably due to the historical and actual scarcity of Church buildings and priests in Latin America, so that religious practices that could be carried out at home became central. To this day, religious celebrations tend to have a strong family dimension among Hispanics, and many, if not most, Hispanic homes have *altarcitos* (home altars) adorned with statues, candles, flowers, holy cards and pictures, and other sacramentals around which family members gather to pray.

- Most Hispanics have not been exposed to lengthy sacramental preparation programs for the same reasons listed above. Another reason is that very few Latin American parishes have the financial resources to hire paid lay ministers, so that any sacramental preparation is organized and carried out by volunteer catechists or by the priests (who minister in parishes that serve hundreds of thousands of people in the surrounding neighborhoods!) It is quite common for a couple to approach the *Padre* (Father) one Sunday, and after attending one session with him or with a catechist during the week, to receive the sacrament they are requesting (for example, marriage or baptism for their child) the very next weekend. Also important to note is that, as can be expected, record keeping in the parishes is not always kept up to date in many areas of these countries.
- The *Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults* has not yet been widely implemented in Latin America. Most recent immigrants from Latin America may not be familiar with the Catechumenate process, or may have never even heard of it before. Also, in many parts of Latin America, including Mexico, Confirmation is usually conferred upon infants or small children, which reflects the traditional order of the sacraments of initiation.
- Hispanics tend to identify more with faith experiences that speak to their sense of community and their sense of justice. These include base community groups (faith sharing groups), prayer groups, apostolic movements, charismatic movements, and family-oriented programs.

## IV. Common Popular Practices and Devotions

A defining characteristic of Hispanic culture is the permeating presence of popular devotions as part of their daily faith lives. As was the practice with Euro-American groups before Vatican II, Hispanic religiosity focuses on signs and symbols, images and statues, holy water and holy cards, rosaries and scapulars, and pilgrimages and processions. Since Columbus arrived in the Americas five centuries ago, popular religion has developed alongside liturgical celebrations as a way for Hispanics to maintain their own cultural values as well as to express their feelings. In the early centuries, for example, the Mass was held by clergy from a foreign land speaking a foreign tongue, and was characterized by simplicity, emotional control, and legalism (characteristics still primarily present in the Roman rite even today). Inculturation, that is, the incarnation of the Gospel message, and indeed of Christ himself, in a given culture, can only be achieved within the Hispanic culture if we know their popular religious traditions well. Which traditions or devotions are so deeply rooted in them that they form part of their identity, and which ones are not as important?

The following is meant to be a brief overview of Hispanic popular religiosity found in relationship to the sacraments and related rites, and more detailed information, guidelines, and even sample rites can be found in resources listed in the Bibliography.

### Sacraments of Initiation and Related Rites

#### Presentation of the Child

Stemming from Mexican and Mexican-American origins, this rite is considered preparatory to and apart from baptism (Puerto Ricans have a similar rite called *Echar Agua*, which literally means "to pour water", but which is also considered a rite apart from the sacrament of baptism). This presentation is generally celebrated either within forty days after birth, or at three years of age, and is celebrated to let the community know that the couple has been blessed by God and has conceived and given life to a new child. The celebration is typically greater with the first-born child of a family.

The presentation usually takes place on a Sunday after the Gospel and homily. The priest marks the child with the sign of the cross and anoints the child with the oil of the catechumens, and may invite the parents and godparents to do the same. He may then ask the parents what name they have chosen for the child, and then asks if they accept the obligation to raise the child in the Christian faith.

This rite comes from centuries past and has developed out of the fear that the child might die without being known by God in the Church. The infant mortality rate was much higher in the past (and continues to be higher in Latin American countries) and parents asked God to bless their child in the hope that God would liberate him or her from death before being baptized.

There are many variations of the rite here in the United States. For example, the presentation may occur before the mass, or on another day besides Sunday, and sometimes the anointing of the child may be left out. (See *Primera Dias*, pgs. 21-29)

## Baptism

The role of godparents and extended family cannot be underestimated for the sacrament of Baptism. For Hispanics, the role of godparent is not just an honorary one, but rather an invitation to enter more deeply into relationship, not only with the one to be baptized, but with the parents and other family members as well. Afterwards, the parents and godparents will call each other *copadre* and *comadre*, and a new, deeper relationship will begin to form. The person to be baptized will now call his godparents *padrina* (godfather) and *madrina* (godmother), and for them the baptized one will be their *ahijado* (godson) or *ahijada* (goddaughter). For this reason, it is not unusual for families to postpone the baptism of a family member until the *padrinas* can be physically present.

A reception for extended family and friends is customary after the Baptism. (See *Primera Dias*, pages 30-57)

## First Communion

There is no question that the primary focus of this sacrament is receiving Jesus in the Eucharist, no matter in which cultural context it may be celebrated. Yet perhaps a distinct characteristic of the sacrament of First Eucharist within Hispanic culture is the important role of extended family and godparents in the celebration. This sacrament, and indeed many other rites and sacraments, cannot be viewed apart from the familial ties linking the child to his or her culture and world. It is not unusual for a First Communion celebration to be postponed if the relationships are not in right order for the celebration, or if a celebration afterwards including family and friends cannot be properly planned. This is another reason the role of godparent is so important. One of their roles is to help with the finances and planning of the familial celebration after the Mass.

Another distinct characteristic is the special place that religious symbols hold, including, for example, the rosary, the candle, the scapular, the prayer book, the holy cards, and the white armband worn by the boys, all of which may be considered of crucial importance in the sacrament. Also, the girl's white dress and veil, which in Latin American countries is frequently passed down from generation to generation, may be elaborate and expensive. Here in the United States, the symbols may not be utilized with such devotion as in many Latin American countries, and in many cases the dress, although very elaborate, is new.

The reception or celebration afterward is very important, since the entire family, extended family, godparents, and friends are usually invited to attend. (See *Primera Dias*, pgs. 59-71)

## Confirmation

In many parts of Latin America, Confirmation has traditionally been conferred upon infants or small children, reflecting the traditional order of the sacraments of initiation. In general, confirmation has not historically functioned as a rite of passage to an adult faith life as it has in the U.S. and Europe, but rather as a completion of baptism and a prelude to receiving the Eucharist. For this reason, many Latinos prefer to return to their homeland for their children to be confirmed rather than having to wait until they are teenagers. (See *Primera Dias*, pgs. 71-74)

## Quince Anos

The celebration of Quince A.fios (*Quinceañera*) is a rite of presentation to adult life, generally of the girl, which is usually celebrated within a mass and with a lavish party afterwards. Its origins are in Mexico, but here in the U.S. it is becoming more and more popular among other Hispanic groups as well.

Some level of catechetical formation and the opportunity to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation usually precedes Quince A.fios. The rite itself is usually celebrated within the Mass, and after the homily. The youth are invited to renew their baptismal promises, and they receive a special blessing from the priest and possibly from their parents and the community. They may also be invited to share a personal statement.

Due to its roots in the rite of passage to a marriageable age, a traditional Quince A.fios celebration can look very much like a wedding, with "escorts" (instead of a husband), the white dress, flowers, and limousines. A debutante's "coming out" celebration in Euro-American culture might be considered comparable.

The celebration of Quince A.fios has become controversial for many reasons, but especially due to the tendency of the rite to be spiritually superficial, and the party to be too extravagant. (See *Primera Dios*, pgs. 75-94)

## **Seasonal Popular Devotions**

### The Posadas

The posadas is a novena beginning December 16 and ending December 24, in which the community processes to different houses or areas of the city, acting out Mary and Joseph's search for a dignified place for the birth of the baby Jesus.

While walking from one place to another, the participants carry images of Jesus and Mary and sing Christmas songs. Once they arrive, half of the group stays outside, asking for shelter, while the other half goes inside and turns them away, until finally at the end of the song, they are allowed to enter.

Once inside, the novena is prayed, and then snacks and punch are generally offered to everyone present. The images of Jesus and Mary are left behind, and the novena on the following night begins there and continues to another house. It is usually considered an honor for a family's house to be chosen to participate in the novena.

On the 24<sup>th</sup>, everyone carries their images of the baby Jesus with them to Midnight Mass, in which the baby is laid in the manger, and the priest proceeds to bless everyone's image of the baby Jesus. After mass, there is a grand celebration, which usually involves dancing, food and drink, as well as pifiatas, and sometimes gifts, for the children.

## *Live Stations of the Cross*

The Spanish missionary priests brought this tradition to Latin America in colonial times, and to this day it is acted out with great fervor on Good Friday. Some people participate in the reenactment of the Stations in order to ask God for a favor, or to thank God for a favor already given. The Stations may be set up outside along the streets of a neighborhood or inside families' houses. Houses are prepared ahead of time with special images of Jesus and Mary, flowers, candles, and other adornments. Between stations, the participants sing and/or pray as they accompany Jesus on the road to Calvary. In some areas of Latin America the crucifixion is acted out with great passion, including the whipping, the crown of thorns, and the actual nailing of the hands and feet to the cross. Afterwards, the man representing Jesus is taken to the hospital to be attended to.

This tradition is still carried out among Hispanics in the United States but usually without the actual mortification of the flesh involved in the reenactment in Latin America. The focus instead is on praying and reflecting on each station, and on the final celebration of the 15<sup>th</sup> station, the Resurrection.

## *All Souls Day*

On this day, November 2, families who wish to remember dead loved ones travel to the cemetery, clean the grave sites or tombs and head stones, decorate the site with flowers, and at times have a meal around the site in order to share the meal with the person(s) who has passed away. This day is also commemorated in the home, with a special photo of family members who have passed away and a special adornment of the home altar. Certain prayers are offered up and a special meal is prepared.

## *Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe*

Although it is not unusual for Latin American countries to celebrate their own special feast day for the Virgin Mary (i.e., Our Lady of Charity *del Cobre* of Cuba, in September), Our Lady of Guadalupe is the patron saint of all of the Americas, and is held very dear to Latin Americans, especially Mexicans. Many miracles have been, and continue to be, attributed to her, and grand celebrations are held in her honor every December 12<sup>th</sup>. In Mexico, these celebrations can last for days or even weeks, and can include long pilgrimages (usually to Mexico City), times of intense prayer, Mass, but also celebration with dance, song, and food. It is a family and community celebration, and even those who rarely practice their faith or have left the Church for other denominations will return for the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. In Mexico, it is rare to see a home without an image of Our Lady somewhere, and even for those who immigrate here to the U.S., although they may arrive without furniture, etc., they carry with them an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, and an *altarcito* is the first part of their new home to be set up.

## V. General Recommendations

Considering the basic characteristics of Hispanic culture and the needs that some Hispanics may have as immigrants in a strange land, the following is a list of possible recommendations offered by the REACH committee for anyone serving the Hispanic community in the field of Religious Education, Sacramental Preparation, and/or Christian Initiation in the parishes:

### Cultural Preservation

- The process of inculturation and incorporation is a slow one! First and foremost, we must all learn to be patient and open to change. "The pope warns repeatedly against attempting to rush a process of assimilation or cultural adaptation in the name of unity, because the goal is mutual enrichment of peoples, not their assimilation to one way of being human" (*Unity in Diversity*, p. 33).
- "Special efforts to acquire the languages of the new immigrants by all church ministers constitute an essential, concrete step towards a full and effective welcome" (*Unity in Diversity*, p. 36). Learn some basic greetings, etc. in Spanish. Talk to the Hispanic parishioners, or create a questionnaire, to find out more about the demographics and the needs of the Hispanic community in your parish. The key to ministering to Hispanics in our U.S. Church is become like St. Paul, who, while being a Jew, became Greek to the Greeks and Roman to the Romans. Know each person and develop a relationship with him or her. This takes time, respect for others' cultures and faith expressions, and a true Christian love that crosses all borders.
- Be open to the possibility of offering some form of catechesis or formation in Spanish in your parish if the Spanish-speaking community is sizeable, especially if a Mass in Spanish is already held on a regular basis (for example, monthly, weekly, or daily). Be aware that parents, who should be the primary educators of their children, are left out if their children are learning about God in another language, and they cannot comprehend what their children are learning.
- Enlist the help of a bilingual/bicultural person, or someone who is culturally sensitive, to assist with the Religious Education of the Latinos in your parish. This person can serve as a bridge between the Parish School of Religion (PSR) and the Hispanic community in the parish there. If this person ends up volunteering more than 10 hours per week, and the needs of the Hispanic community are ongoing, try to secure a just salary for the person who is ministering in the parish in this way. Also, if the PSR in your parish has a receptionist/secretary/administrative assistant position, consider hiring a bilingual person to fill it, or enlist the help of a bilingual volunteer to work in the PSR office a few hours per week.

## Social and Economic Status

- Become knowledgeable about the socio-economic background of the Hispanics in your parish . Remember that there is a hierarchy of needs, and that the spiritual needs of a person or group cannot be nurtured if the physical, and even social, needs have not been met first. Try to understand that a Religious Education program for Hispanics, especially Hispanic immigrant communities, cannot be effective if it does not take into account these physical and social needs as well. Examples of possible ways to assist the Hispanic community through the PSR program include:
  1. Allowing the parents to pay the annual R.E. fee or any other fees in installments, over time, as well as encouraging those who are financially able in the parish to assist those who are not with fees (i.e., scholarships, sponsorships)
  2. Inviting medical mobiles or volunteer medical personnel to the parish to provide free medical services at least once or twice per year, or hiring a part-time or full-time bilingual parish nurse
  3. Offering Life Skills classes which might include topics such as Parenting Skills, Domestic/Sexual Abuse, Alcoholism, and presentations by non-profit or government agencies which serve Hispanics (for example, St. Vincent de Paul or Catholic Social Services, immigration and refugee services, etc.)
  4. Being able to refer those in need to an appropriate agency who can help them
  5. Addressing issues of Social Justice regularly in catechesis or formation
- Take into account that although Hispanics tend not to have the same levels of academic education that the dominant culture does, they do bring a unique quality of experience to their learning. In U.S. parishes,

"...Teachers very often come from the white middle class and have no memory of the times when their immigrant ancestors were poor and struggling in a hostile environment. Few religious educators have had the experience of being migrant workers with the insecurity that entails; undocumented aliens fighting for their lives and living always in the fear of being apprehended; treated as a child or as incompetent because one's mastery of English was not adequate; struggling with two or three jobs in order to raise a family in the U.S. and at the same time helping the remaining members of the family who are still in the country of origin. When religious education programs make use of all these experiences, Hispanic adults will find themselves being addressed in a direct way and not merely by chance as is the situation now" (*Adult Religious Education for the Hispanic Community*, pgs. 32-33).

## Relationships/Communication Styles

- Because familial and communal ties are so strong among Hispanics, **catechesis for the entire family is encouraged**. Since many Hispanic adults have had very little exposure to Doctrine, take advantage of parent meetings, etc. to evangelize and catechize the parents, and to invite them to get more involved in the different aspects of parish life. They so often yearn to learn and do more. On meeting, workshops, or retreat days for parents or for catechists, offer childcare, if possible. Be aware that the majority of people who will respond to these special meeting or workshop days will probably be the mothers whose husbands work long hours and who may have no one with whom to leave their children.
- Educate staff and catechists about the different communication styles that exist between the dominant U.S. culture and the Hispanic culture. Take these different ways of communicating into account when planning methodology or other catechist workshops, meetings, and when ministering to the Hispanic community.
- Personally invite individual people to participate in your programs and gatherings, rather than inviting them only by mail, phone, or the parish bulletin. Get to know as many people as you can and let them experience genuine hospitality through you and the Religious Education and parish staff.
- Be open to using the *Mutual Invitation Process* during meetings and/or gatherings that include persons from varying ethnic/racial/cultural backgrounds. Such a process allows all persons present to feel welcome and invited to participate (See Appendix B for more details concerning the process).

## Teaching/Learning Style

- Hispanic learners are people oriented and so work well in groups, and often appreciate feedback from their teachers. Hispanics' preferred teaching style is by lectures, talks, and stories, so catechesis must emphasize the spoken word over the written. Storytelling, celebrations, plays, skits, and audiovisuals are good ways to proclaim the gospel with them. Also, take into account that because of differing communications styles, Hispanics may not readily participate in class unless they are called on by name.
- Catechists working with Hispanics should be flexible concerning schedules and physical arrangements for carrying out catechesis. Due to many factors, including the fact that many Hispanics come from areas where regular attendance at Mass was not an option, let alone attendance of regular catechesis, and that many Hispanics do not have transportation, or work long hours, or have no one with whom to leave their children, etc., catechists may need to be flexible or willing to go where the people are in order to facilitate the catechetical encounter with them.

## Faith and Religion

- Be aware of the level of religious education that the majority of Latinos in your parish have received in their countries of origin. Many Hispanics, for many reasons, might be considered only nominal Catholics, only attending Mass for the celebration of the receiving of sacraments, or perhaps for Christmas or Easter. Probably in most parishes in Latin America, consistent, life-long catechesis is not offered, and so many adult Hispanics have little doctrinal background. The document *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us* (USCCB, 2000) insists that catechesis in a parish should focus on the adults, and this is especially true for the Hispanic community. Formation for adults may be offered and encouraged through basic doctrinal classes, Life Skills classes, small group faith sharing, parent meetings, family catechesis, etc. Many parishes successfully take advantage of the hour in which the children are in weekly catechesis to evangelize and catechize the parents as well.
- A key to being able to effectively catechize and minister to the Hispanic community is to educate yourself about the role of "popular religion" in Latino communities. "Popular religion" for Hispanics is tied up with the people's very identity and being. Open your heart and mind to experiencing different and beautiful expressions of our faith, and allow yourself to be enriched by the deep understanding of symbols and rituals, and the many other gifts, the Hispanic community offers us. The *National Pastoral Plan for Hispanic Ministry* (USCCB, 1987) emphasizes that popular religion is "the Spirit who is alive in the gathering of our people" (no. 8) and encourages us all to enrich our liturgical celebrations with cultural expressions of faith.

If you have any doubts about what is important to the Hispanics of your particular parish, ASK THEM, and then take advantage of the rituals and devotions they hold dear to their hearts to grow in your own faith life and to evangelize, catechize, and ultimately bring them, and you, closer to Christ. (For more information, see section on Popular Devotions.)

- Educate the Hispanic community about the Catholic Church in the United States. Be aware of some of the main differences so you can explain those differences to them. Realize that in general, Hispanics are not accustomed to the longer periods of preparation for sacraments and the long process of Christian Initiation, and will need to be introduced to these new ways of doing things with a lot of love, patience, and understanding.

**For a general checklist for aspects of successful ministry in a multicultural parish, refer to Appendix A.**

## VI. Conclusion

Religious education for Hispanics should utilize a methodology that will speak to the reality in which Hispanics find themselves. It should lead them to a deeper experience of Christ through family and community, and should take advantage of the teachable moments in their culture and lives to connect them with the God of salvation history. It should be intellectual as well as affective, instructive as well as warm and personal.

We must never forget that it is together that we from many cultures form the one Body of Christ. We are mutually enriched by each other's presence and gifts. We must constantly search for ways to unite the English-speaking, Spanish-speaking, and others in the parish. Perhaps we can continue to find ways to plan and celebrate Culture Appreciation Days, International Fiestas, and other cultural activities, or plan service projects, prayer services, or especially Eucharistic liturgies together. It is essential that the unique groups within a parish come to know, accept, and celebrate each other's presence in the community. It is only in this way will we ever truly be able to say that we have come to know Christ by becoming the Body of Christ, bread for a broken world.

*If you have any questions or comments about these recommendations, please contact Pamela Villacres, Director of the Office of Hispanic Lay Ministry Formation in the Department of Religious Education of the Archdiocese of Atlanta, at (404) 885-7413.*



## VII. Appendix A

### Checklist for Aspects of Successful Ministry in a Multicultural Church

*Which of the following is being carried out in your parish?*

- Has ministers who are aware of their own cultural heritage and biases, and are willing to learn about, share, and celebrate diversity in the parish
- Trains staff and parish ministers to be culturally competent
- Welcomes by name, and encourages and empowers ALL to participate
- Develops parish leaders who reflect the ethnic characteristics of the different parish groups (who can then serve as a great resources, or "bridge people", for others ministering in the parish!)
- Invites parishioners from various cultures and/or diverse populations into decision-making and planning
- Utilizes methods such as *Mutual Invitation* in multiculturalism meetings and/or gatherings in order to give all gathered an opportunity to share (See Appendix B)
- Plans programs and activities that include various dimensions and methods in order to reach people with unique learning styles and modes of understanding
- Emphasizes the catholicity of the Church, both universal and local, reminding parishioners that we as Church are unity in diversity
- Incorporates cultural traditions, rituals, and values that represent the parish into programs, activities, and especially into prayer and worship.
- Provides opportunities for parishioners to experience first-hand a variety of cultural traditions (international fiestas, mission trips, etc.)
- Encourages study of the Bishop's documents concerning the multicultural church, including *Unity and Diversity: Welcoming The Stranger Among Us* (USCCB, 1987).
- Teaches about and/or discusses the sinfulness of discrimination
- Fosters acceptance, respect, and celebration of cultural diversity in the parish and in the world

# Appendix B

## The Mutual Invitation Process

### PURPOSE

To ensure that each person in the group is invited **by name** to share in an atmosphere of mutual respect.

**R** Take **Responsibility** for what you say and feel without blaming others.

**E** Use **Empathetic** listening-enter into the other person's situation and point of view.

**S** Be **Sensitive** to differences in communication styles.

**P** **Ponder** what you hear and feel before you speak.

**E** **Examine** your own assumptions and perceptions.

**C** Keep **Confidentiality**.

**T** **Tolerate** ambiguity because we are not here to debate who is right or wrong.

### METHOD

1. The leader clarifies what the group members are being invited to share.
2. The leader gives guidelines about the use of time.
3. The leader may share first or may invite another person **by name** to share.
4. The person who is invited does not need to be the person next to you.
5. After the person has spoken, he or she is given the privilege to invite another person **by name** to share.
6. If the person invited chooses not to share, the person may simply say "pass" and proceed to invite another person **by name** to share. No explanation is needed or given for passing.
7. The process will continue until everyone has been invited to speak.
8. At that time any person who passed will be invited again to share. Persons are still free to pass.
9. The main activity of the group is to listen.

### RATIONALE

The mutual invitation method is a way to include all people in the conversation in a very respectful atmosphere. While each person is speaking, the others listen. No one may interrupt the speaker or jump in to speak without being invited by name. In this method, no one has more authority than anyone else—each person is invited to share, and after sharing that person has the privilege to invite who will share next.

*(This process is based on material by Eric HF. Law and has been adapted by many institutions including MAGG)*

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