Hispanic American Immigration: Challenges and Opportunities

Brief History of Immigration to the U.S.

Hispanic immigration to the United States started with Columbus’ re-discovery of the continent on October 12, 1492. The first post-Columbus settlements in current U.S. territory were highly religious communities. A bull by Pope Alexander VI (1493) ordered the partitioning of America and summoned early Spanish immigrants “to instruct the inhabitants in the Catholic faith and good manners” (Waterman 2002). This explains why many of the Spanish settlements’ names had religious motifs. In California the famous Franciscan missionary Fray Junípero Serra founded 21 missions along the California coast, by El Camino Real (also known as the California Mission Trail, the Royal Road, and the King’s Highway). He founded the mission of San Diego in 1769 and Monterrey in 1770. Sánchez affirms that descendants of the colonial Spanish Americans still live in California, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas (2006:66).

The first European settlements in America were Spanish speaking communities. According to Judith Bense, Tristan de Luna and Arellano, two Spanish conquistadors, led an expedition with fifteen hundred people to Pensacola Bay in 1559, establishing a permanent Spanish settlement. Other well-known Spanish settlements were Saint Augustine in Florida, founded in 1565, and Santa Fe, 1607-1608 (1999:45). Conrad Kottak estimates that by 1825 most of Spain’s colonies in U.S. territory “were politically independent” (2005:250).

Immigration to America from other European countries was slow at first. The Bureau of the Census (1949) estimates that the U.S. European population grew from only 210 in 1610 to 2,499 in 1620, an annual average growth of about 229 people. However, by 1880 the population surpassed the 50 million mark. Kottak estates that “European nations competed for colonies between 1875 and 1914” (2005:242). By 1900, the U.S. had become a core nation within the world system, with nearly 90 million people, and had overtaken Great Britain in iron, coal, and cotton production. America
had become a prosperous nation and millions of people from other countries, including Latin America, flocked through its borders in pursuit of freedom and upward mobility.

Early immigration to U.S. territory is accredited to Christians who wanted to protect their families from corruption and persecution. Jim Cullen emphasizes that the Puritans did not leave England merely for their own benefit, “they were afraid that their children would be corrupted” in Europe (2003:16). However, the explosive immigration movement is attributed more to clever marketing by investors who saw an opportunity to become wealthy in the new land. Luring people to North America was the result of smart advertising.

The Impact of Marketing on Immigration

English literature promoting immigration to America did not begin appearing until almost a century after Christopher Columbus’ famous letter to the King and Queen of Castille, Spain (1493). Scholars view this letter as the first piece of promotional literature for the New World. This literature intended to “advance New World exploration and colonization” (Scouten 2002:4). It was directed primarily at potential investors and sought to promote the settlement of a particular colony. Cullen regards the first great American Dream as the dream “of a small group of English religious dissenters who traversed an ocean seeking a way of worshiping God as they saw fit” (2003:8). This was true for the beginnings of immigration to North America, but by the late 1900s, immigrants were largely looking for better financial horizons.

Land of Riches and Plenty

Based on Columbus’ exaggerated and poetic description of America as a land of plenty, promoters embarked on a marketing campaign to entice Europeans to move to the New Land. Zerubavel notes that aided by the newly developed printing press some 10,000 copies of Columbus’ positive portrait of America were circulating in Europe and that by the end of the 15th century, his letter was translated to Latin, Italian, Spanish, and English. However, reports of sailors returning to Europe with a real account of the hardships they encountered in America, partially neutralized Columbus’ positive accounts about the continent (Zerubavel 1992:36).

Land of Opportunity

George Scouten believes that since the myth of America as a land of plenty and gold did not attract the quantity of immigrants necessary to establish a solid economic society in America, promoters created a new
myth, the land of opportunity. This myth complemented the myth of plenty. The myth maintained that America had unlimited resources of wealth, but needed bold men of industry to harvest the fruit (2002:130). Research by Daniel Denton argued that promotional literature, at the time, indicated that America was essentially vacant and was in great need of English settlement and improvement. He wrote, “How many poor people in the world would think themselves happy had they an Acre or two of Land,” while in America, there “is hundreds, nay thousands of Acres that would invite inhabitants” (1937:21).

**Land of Destiny**

Failing to attract Europeans to America by materialistic arguments, promoters finally capitalized on the family concerns of faithful Christians who feared for the salvation of their children. Thus, the slogan of America as a land of destiny was born. This myth was advertised using biblical references to express the Christian mandate to “replenish the earth and subdue it” (Gen 1:28). To fulfill this biblical commission, they added that the unpopulated North American territory was ready to be replenished and subdued. Promoters summoned English people with the concept that they were obligated by the Bible to colonize America (Scouten 2002:177).

Many sermons about America during the first months of 1609 were part of a propaganda campaign by the Virginia Company to recruit immigrants for the New Land. Alexander Whitaker (1613), an Anglican minister, believed that God had opened the door of Virginia to his country of England in a providential manner, to help its “ignorant inhabitants.”

America was compared metaphorically with the Land of Canaan and as a new Garden of Eden (Scouten 2002:201; Seed 1995:26). Comparisons between Eden and America are among the most frequent biblical references in promotional literature. Overarching these comparisons was the implication that the discovery of the New Eden was a blessing from God akin to the first great Garden of Eden.

By using the analogy of America as a New Eden, promoters not only built upon the myth of plenty established by reports of America’s great bounty, but also were able to imply the ease with which that bounty was to be had. Bible references such as Genesis 2:15 were quoted to preach God’s mandrake to take care of the New Eden and to look after it. The New World became a place where nature was spontaneous and very little labor needed to be applied in order to garner the earth’s fruits (Arneil 1996:74).

A powerful sermon used by the Virginia Company to encourage Europeans to come to North America was preached by William Symonds in 1609. Drawing from Genesis 12, God’s call to Abram to leave his mother-land and go to an unknown land, he preached: “Let us be cheerful to go

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Norton: Hispanic American Immigration: Challenges and Opportunities

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49
to the place, that God will show us to possess in peace and plenty, a Land more like the garden of Eden: which the Lord planted than any part else of all the earth” (cited in Scouten 2002:26).

Native Americans were mistakenly conceived as uncivilized savages living in prehistoric times, when in fact, people from the New Land such as Aztecs, Mayans, and Incas developed states and civilizations comparable to those of Mesopotamia and Egypt. Kottak upholds that uncivilized actions were more evident among Europeans than among Native Americans. The examination of thousands of skeletons by researchers revealed that post Columbus skeletons show 50 percent more traumatic injuries (2005:246).

Although not predicted by European promoters, the riches beyond the sunset of America rested on the hard work, vision, and resolve of immigrants. By the first half of the 20th century, they transformed the country into a booming economy where immigrants of all places could enjoy liberty and prosperity and move “from rags to riches.” Andrew Carnegie is a perfect example. From rags to riches is a journey he portrayed throughout his life. He was born into poverty in Scotland, moved to America in 1848, and with high dreams and hard work became a powerful businessman and “the richest man in the world” (Carnegie 2008).

**Hispanic Immigration: Challenges and Opportunities for Ministry**

The 2010 U.S. Census revealed that as of July 1, 2009 the Hispanic population in the U.S. reached the staggering figure of 48.4 million, not including 4 million residents of Puerto Rico. Only Mexico with 111 million has a larger Hispanic population. Most Hispanics in the U.S. have a Mexican background (66%), followed by 9 percent from Puerto Rico, 3.4 percent Cuban, 3.4 percent Salvadoran, and 2.8 percent Dominican. The explosive Hispanic growth in the country is due to a “combination of a high birth rate and continued immigration” (Sánchez 2006:xvi). The 2010 U.S. Census projects that by 2050, Hispanics will grow to 132.8 million and will constitute 30 percent of the nation’s population. The monumental growth of Hispanic Americans (HAs), presents an opportunity for ministry that local churches should carefully consider.

The 2010 U.S. Census disclosed that Hispanics grew 1.4 million from July 1, 2008 to July 1, 2009; in fact, the average annual growth among Hispanics from 1990 (22.4 million) to 2010 (48.4 million) has been 1.3 million. Almost half of all Hispanics in the U.S. (47%) live in California (13.7 million) and Texas (9.1 million). New Mexico is the state with the highest percentage of Hispanics (47%). Other states with significant Hispanic population are Arizona (31%), Nevada (26%), Florida (22%), and Colorado (20%).
Los Angeles County has a Hispanic population of 4.7 million, one of the largest Hispanic concentrations in the world.

**Opportunities for Evangelism**

The explosive immigration of the latter part of the twentieth century was responsible for placing first-generation immigrants at the top of all minority groups. However, demographers predict their children (second generation) will surpass them in numbers by the year 2020. Research by Roberto Suro and Jeffrey Passel bring to the fore the fact that fertility rates among Latino immigrants are higher than in any other segment of the U.S. They estimate that between 2000 and 2020, the number of second-generation Latinos in U.S. schools will double and the number in the U.S. labor force will triple. Their research points out that in 2000 the fertility rate was 3.51 births per woman for first-generation Hispanics compared to 1.84 for non-Hispanic Whites overall. Hispanic women fertility is also higher than that of Blacks (2.53) and Asians (2.60). Based on these figures, one can deduce that baptisms among Hispanics would yield higher biological church growth and thus deserves careful consideration for church growth projections. By 2020 HAs will constitute 36 percent of all Hispanics in the country, compared to 34 percent first generation immigrants, and 30 percent third-plus generation immigrants (2003:3). Table 1 illustrates past and projected growth among HAs.

**Table 1. Hispanic Population by Generation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Plus</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>30%</td>
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*Source: Suro and Passel 2003:4.*

**The Hispanic-American Challenge**

Becoming a majority among the Hispanic community is a reality Christian churches should not take lightly, but, at the same time it is a challenge. Historically, first generation Hispanic immigrants have been receptive to the gospel and many Christian churches in the U.S., capitalizing on their receptivity, have attracted them successfully to their congregations. Many congregations have experienced several decades of growth because of immigrants, but these congregations now face the challenge of keeping their offspring in the church. Baptizing HAs up to the junior high school age had not been as difficult as retaining and baptizing the unbaptized once they reach college age.
An e-mail survey with four questions was sent to most Hispanic Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) conference leaders of the North American Division (NAD), inquiring about their Hispanic membership, the number of baptisms in 2010, the percentage of HA pastors employed in their fields, and the percentage of members from poor, middle, and upper classes. Twenty responses were received and tabulated for analysis. One of the responses included the tabulated input of 28 pastors from the Southern California Conference. Alfredo Lee, the vice-president for Hispanic Ministries, gave the survey to 36 ministers at a general pastors’ meeting and was able to retrieve 28 of them. The results show a proportionate approximation of HA baptisms compared to church membership and a disproportionate number of HA pastors, compared to membership percentage. Table 2 presents an overall picture of the survey results.

Table 2. SDA Membership by Generation and HA Baptisms in NAD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Membership %</th>
<th>Baptisms %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First generation</td>
<td>74.4</td>
<td>77.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second generation</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>22.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second generation pastors</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hispanic American Pastors

One reason revealed by some participants as to why the number of HA pastors is low among Hispanic payroll budgets in local conferences is that good bilingual speakers are in great demand among English speaking churches located in growing Hispanic populations. This may be an important issue to be investigated. How many HA pastors are graduating from our universities? How many of them are employed by Hispanic churches? How many by English speaking churches? What is their preferred language for employment?

U.S. Poverty Rate and Baptismal Rate

The 2010 U.S. Census revealed a poverty rate among Hispanics of 23.2% in 2009, up from 21.5% in 2008. According to this research, the poverty rate among Hispanic SDA churches is much higher (68.1%). An explanation of this high membership rate among the poor in Hispanic churches is associated with the high rate of baptisms among first generation immigrants who generally emigrate to the U.S. in poverty and tend to be very receptive to the gospel. Table 3 illustrates baptisms among Hispanics by social class in the NAD during 2010.
Why Hispanic Americans Leave the Church—A Quantitative Study

A qualitative instrument was created and distributed by the researcher to study why HAs leave the church and why some stay in the church. Two methods were used to identify and recruit the 116 study participants. One method requested Adventist pastors to give the survey to their HA church members and mail them back to me for analysis. However, I collected most of the surveys as I served as a guest speaker at different Spanish speaking churches and convocations in the U.S. During the meetings, I recruited volunteers eighteen years and older to participate in the study. Surveys were handed out during the meetings and collected by ushers at the end of the service. Several hundred surveys were distributed in this manner and 116 were collected. The low return is accredited to the length of the questionnaire, 86 questions.

Survey questions were divided into five areas: (1) personal information, (2) religious and social experience, (3) information regarding language, (4) information regarding culture and acculturation, and (5) reasons they know why Hispanic Americans leave the church. The data collected was entered into the Statistical Survey Package Software and analyzed for descriptive information.

Information about the Person

The majority of participants, 73%, were females and 67% of all participants were single. Regarding education, 21% completed college (15% in SDA institutions) and 25% reported having completed graduate studies (10% in SDA institutions). Regarding the religion of parents when arriving to the U.S., 77% indicated their parents were Catholics, compared to 31% whose parents were SDAs.

Information about Religious and Social Experience

All participants reported having a similar number of friends among Hispanic Americans, Hispanics, and White Americans. Regarding religious background and habits in reading the Bible, 55% were born in an SDA home and only 35 of all the interviewees (30.2%) read the Bible on a weekly basis. Most of the participants (n. 108) believed the SDA Church

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poor class</td>
<td>68.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle class</td>
<td>25.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper class</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Baptisms by Social Class Among Hispanics in the NAD
is the true church of God and attended church on a weekly basis. Attendance was statistically significant, considering that 4 participants were not church members. This study indicated that a high attendance at church services and involvement in church activities were key factors for retaining HAs in the church.

Information Regarding Language

Cultural assimilation among immigrants is associated with assimilation of the language of the land. This research shows that 68% of immigrants speak both languages at home and 17% of HA parents go to English speaking churches. An important statistic from the study discovered that 72 of the HA children (62.6%) speak and understand both languages well and that 93 (80.2%) have visited their parents’ country of origin. However, 77.6% of HA participants believe immigrants should not bring their culture to the U.S. When asked about their preferred language for church services, 63.5% indicated they prefer both languages, compared to 20% who preferred Spanish and 63.5% English.

Information Regarding Culture and Acculturation

Approximately half of participants, 48.3%, believe that reconciling cultural differences between Hispanic immigrants and Hispanic-Americans is difficult, compared to 53.4% of the participants who believed that reconciling differences between Hispanic-Americans and Anglo-Americans is more difficult. These figures reflect the bicultural challenges HAs face in the U.S. One significant finding about culture is that almost all participants, 96.5%, consider “important” and “very important” the preservation of their parents’ culture. Regarding consumption of Hispanic products, 77.2% indicated they consume them “very often” (36.0%) or “often” (41.2%).

Why Hispanic-Americans Leave the Church

A total of fourteen options regarding why HAs leave the church were presented in the survey. The highest selected options in order of priority were that the “church services are too boring” (50.0%), “family problems not related to the church” (48.3%), “sin” (43.1%), and “church members are not friendly” (40.5%). Next on descending order were “having to work on Sabbath” (39.7%), “church norms are too strict” (38.8%), and “no opportunity to express themselves in English” (32.8%), “cultural barriers” (28.4%) and “rejection by Hispanic immigrants” (23.3%) were other reasons why some HAs no longer go to church.
Why Hispanic Americans Leave the Church—A Qualitative Study

In-depth interviews with twenty youth who no longer attended the SDA Church were conducted to find out why they had left the church. Participants were selected conveniently by the investigator as he served as a guest speaker at Hispanic convocations in five states: California, Florida, Illinois, Michigan, and Maryland. The study revealed that most participants left the church when they became emancipated from their parents or when their parents were no longer able to force them to go to church. “If I go,” one of them said, “it is because I want to go and not because I’m forced to go.” Most interviewees believed that going to church is not bad but should not be imposed by their parents. They added that such imposition was one of the reasons why they left the church.

Language of Worship

Several interviewees indicated they left the Spanish speaking church because they could not understand the language. Some of them moved to English speaking churches but did not feel comfortable in the White church environment. Interestingly, several interviewees indicated that before elementary school, they spoke Spanish fluently and have childhood recordings of them speaking Spanish. However, once they went to school, they spoke English with their friends and forgot the language of their parents.

Disassociation, Not Desertion

When asked about their affiliation with the SDA Church, most interviewees responded they consider themselves Adventists despite the fact that they no longer attend church. They believe going to church does not make them “feel overly enlightened or benefited.” When they go to church, occasionally, it is to please their parents and to spend time with them. One of them confessed that when he goes to church to hear a high profile preacher, he leaves the church service “the same as I came in.” Another participant indicated that preachers “preach good things but [are] not relevant for young people.” When asked about church attendance by their White SDA friends, one interviewee said: “Our feelings as HAs about going to church are no different from the feelings of my White SDA friends.” Other interviewees believe that their bicultural background put them in a more difficult situation for having to deal with first generation cultural differences.
Required Chapel Attendance at SDA Colleges Is Not Helping

Some SDA colleges require students to attend a certain number of devotional services during the week, allegedly to foster spirituality among students. Failure to meet chapel attendance requirements leads to fines that can add up to several hundred dollars a semester. To avoid penalties, a number of boarding school students attend required devotional services during the week but do not go to church on Sabbath mornings, a service not required.

Sabbath Observance

Some interviewees pointed out that first generation lay leaders in most Hispanic churches tend to be legalistic and have reduced religion to a list of “dos” and “don’ts.” One participant said that Sabbath keeping is so full of don’ts, “Practically everything that is fun for young people cannot be done on Sabbath.” He complained about not being able to watch his favorite cartoons on Sabbath or watch his favorite baseball team play on TV. Some said that Sabbath keeping is tedious and burdensome. Another interviewee, reminiscing about Sabbath at his SDA home said: “I could not wait until sundown to have fun with my friends and watch television.”

When asked about what the church can do to attract and retain HAs, the consensus suggested fostering English or bilingual dialogue during Sabbath School so youth can speak in their preferred language. The creation of new structures of participation, other than giving Bible studies was also suggested. Some HAs feel first generation immigrants do not trust them for leadership positions which are generally assigned to more mature immigrant members.

It should be noted that most of the reasons uncovered by the research as to why HAs leave the church, are similar to the reasons why other ethnic groups have defected from their congregations. However, there is much the church can do to retain HAs by facilitating the use of English during church services, accepting cultural differences, and becoming more sympathetic to the needs of second generation immigrants.

Strategies for Evangelism

Reaching immigrants for Christ is a complex task that needs contextualization as well as a thorough approach to ministry. The suggestions presented in this section stem from the author’s experience of ministry among Hispanic immigrants for over two decades in Southern California and from the findings gained during this investigation. This section is divided into three areas. First, the inductive research which provides a
universal strategy to face any church challenge, including challenges associated with immigrants of any generation. The second section is devoted to working with immigrants, and the final section offers suggestions for ministering among the children of immigrants.

Inductive Research

Inductive research has been adopted by the sciences as an optimum way to explore new ways to tackle challenges, because it allows researchers to use accepted concepts as a means to gain new knowledge and to investigate the reasons associated with a problem before a course of action is prescribed.

In the early 1600s, Francis Bacon identified a different approach to gaining knowledge. Rather than moving from the general to the specific, Bacon looked at the gathering of specific information in order to make general conclusions. He is considered a pioneer of inductivism, a view of the scientific method wherein scientists are seen as starting with unbiased observations of facts, progressively piling up more and more facts by means of those observations, and arriving at various conclusions (Moreland and Craig 2003:146). Ministers can learn inductively why their churches are failing to retain and reach a particular social group by asking the right questions and creating solutions based on the findings.

In the context of evangelism among generational immigrants, inductive research begins with the history of the problem. The purpose is to diagnose first and then prescribe a proper remedy. For instance, before prescribing a solution to the problem of disaffiliation and defection among second-generation immigrants, church leaders should begin by uncovering the reasons why they are leaving the church. This diagnostic work requires contextualized research among an appropriate sample of individuals. The reasons why people leave a church, in a particular region, may be different from the reasons why people leave the church in other places. Based on the responses, church leaders could look at what other congregations have done in the face of similar problems and prescribe an intervention appropriate for their context. Once a course of action is prescribed and implemented, results must be evaluated to ascertain their effectiveness. Surveys and interviews for this research aimed to retrieve data to diagnose why HAs leave the church and based on the data analysis, the study offered corrective strategies.

Analogous to what occurs in the treatment of human disease, not all interventions for church problems are successful, just as not all prescriptions in the medical field are effective for all patients. When interventions do not work, inductive researchers go back to the drawing board until an effective prescription for the problem is found.
It should be noted that attempting to bring back children of immigrants who leave the church in which they grew up has biblical foundations. Jesus associated his ministry with defectors from his people and when sending the Twelve to the mission field he ordered them to go first to the “lost sheep of Israel” (Matt 10:6; 15:24).

The Need for Ministerial Training

Training pastors in inductive research is necessary to prescribe appropriately for the needs of each generation of immigrants. Seminaries as well as denominational entities need to train ministers as well as lay members on how to go about ministry inductively.

Ministering Among First Generation Immigrants

First generation immigrants face a number of physical and social needs that can be capitalized on for ministry. Most immigrants arrive in the new land in poverty after leaving behind close friends. Financial constraints, loneliness, separation from relatives, and language barriers are some of the main reasons why immigrants are so receptive to the gospel. Research among Hispanic pastors conducted by the Research Department of the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention disclosed a number of needs among immigrants with potential for evangelism. Each need can be used by churches to develop plans to serve the community and to attract people to the local church. The list is presented with the caveat that the order of priority may vary from one community to another. The needs included (1) need for getting better jobs (68%), (2) helping new immigrants to establish themselves (60.8%), (3) counseling programs (60.8%), (4) English or citizenship classes (58.3%), (5) church/community sports programs (51.7%), (6) job training (50%), (7) after school programs for teenagers (49.2%), (8) drug/alcoholic rehabilitation programs (45%), (9) programs to reduce violence among the families (40%), and (10) food distribution (37.5%) (Sánchez 2006:212).

Planting Immigrant Churches

Planting churches is an effective evangelistic strategy utilized by the Apostle Paul and implied in the great commission (Matt 28:19-20). Research by Daniel Sánchez regarding evangelism among immigrants in the U.S. points out the fact that “Hispanics are showing more receptivity to the Evangelical message than ever before in the history of the country” (2006:233). He further accentuates the fact that more churches are being planted among Hispanic immigrants in the country “than ever before” (2006:233). Research among Seventh-day Adventist leaders from the
North American Division (SDA-NAD) showed that most baptisms in 2010 (77.4%) occurred among first generation immigrants. Planting new immigrant churches and reaching immigrants will continue to be successful as long as the flow of immigrants continues. Statistics show that Hispanic immigration rates move up and down according to the nation’s job market. The financial struggles and high unemployment rates during the first decade of the new century, showed a decrease in immigration to the U.S. However, thousands of receptive immigrants continue to immigrate annually to the country providing a large potential for evangelism.

Ministering Among Second-Generation Immigrants

Hispanic immigrants, who are currently a majority among all generational Hispanics, are more receptive to the gospel. However, statistics project that their children will surpass them in numbers by 2020. Additionally, the church is having difficulty keeping them and reaching them for Christ. Research among Hispanic SDA-NAD leaders in early 2011, showed that of all baptisms during 2010, only 22.6% were from second-generation immigrants. This was significantly lower compared to the HA population in the nation at the time of the study. It is estimated that this generation will surpass in number their progenitors by 2020. Table 4 compares SDA baptisms in 2010 with national ratios of Hispanic by generation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2010—(Baptisms)</th>
<th>2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>38% (77.4%)</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>32% (22.6%)</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Plus</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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HAs form a complex multicultural ethnic group with combined cultural traits learned from their ancestors and acquired from the land where they were born. In-depth interviews with ex-church members from this group, twenty years and older, revealed that the reasons why they no longer attend church are similar to those of non-immigrants their age. However, two additional factors were disclosed, (1) limited opportunities to expressed their religious views and questions in English at some Spanish speaking churches, and (2) discontent with the gossip and criticism among immigrant church members. An interviewee explained that some immigrant members “play God” by “pointing out errors” and “never express encouraging words or extend a helping hand when you are down.” One Caribbean young man shared that his final decision to leave the church was made when the church board disciplined him for dating a
non-Adventist girl who was already attending church and receiving Bible studies to become a Seventh-day Adventist. Below are listed several suggestions to help retain and attract HAs.

**Bilingual services:** HAs are not always fluent in Spanish for obvious reasons. While their foundational education is generally received in the language of their birth country, most of their friends and acquaintances speak English. Although many HAs understand Spanish well, they communicate better in English and prefer to discuss religious issues in the language they know. Along the same line of thought, bilingual church services presented in broken English are not the type of worship services they are willing to attend. Effective bilingual church services need to be led by capable bilingual leaders.

**Plant Hispanic American churches:** church planting is considered one of the most effective church growth strategies. It was used by Paul, it was commanded by Jesus in the great commission, and it is one of the most effective ways to reach new communities for Christ. Church plants can be designed to target specific ethnic or social groups. Planting churches tailored to HA needs is an effective way to retain and reach this group. People tend to be attracted by their own kind and will feel more attracted to churches led and attended by their own people.

**Contextualization:** HAs listen to music and dress similarly as their homogeneous peers. Unfortunately, research reveals that their music and dress preferences often collide with the music and fashion required by first generation church leaders. In their opinion, the use of ties and formal suits to participate in the church service are trivial requirements from churches led by first generation leaders.

**Cloning effective strategies:** investigating what other churches are doing successfully to reach HAs and adapting strategies to meet denominational values is a type of pragmatic evangelism that saves time and money. Reaching and keeping second generation immigrants in the church is a challenge currently faced by most Christian churches in the U.S. Researching what strategies have worked for some of them will provide ideas to tackle the problem in particular parishes.

**Leadership style:** an autocratic leadership style does not fit well in a culturally democratic country. Even among Seventh-day Adventists in the NAD, congregations prefer to be consulted by conference officials before a new pastor is assigned to them. HAs are the product of a nation that fosters freedom of speech and democracy. Americans tend to be diplomatic in their conversations and democratic in their leadership style. On the other hand, many Hispanic churches are led by first generation lay leaders who are very direct and confrontational in the way they communicate and autocratic in style. HAs, as most other Americans, prefer going
to churches where their voice can be heard, where their opinions are respected, and where a more democratic leadership style is exerted.

Proactive measures: one interviewee who no longer attends church services, when asked the question, What can the congregation do to prevent young people like you from leaving the church? replied that trying to bring defectors back to the church “would be a waste of time.” Her proactive suggestion was that to invest time and energy preserving those who are still in the church would be more productive than to bring back to the flock those who left and are still bitter about the church. This particular person suggested the creation of worship services where the youth can lead in praise and worship. In her opinion, the children’s story during the Sabbath worship service is not enough to keep children in the church. Churches should intentionally create new structures of participation where young people are involved in ministry and can cement their faith in Christ before they go to college.

Conclusion

The steady increase in the number of second generation HAs during the second decade of the New Millennium has been triggered by the monumental immigration growth of their ancestors during the previous two decades. Christian churches and Seventh-day Adventist churches in particular are currently having difficulty reaching and retaining this social group. The Adventist failure to effectively evangelize them requires a change of strategy and attitude. This research reveals the opinions of HAs who have left the church, as well as the opinions of those who still attend church on a regular basis. The strategies for practice suggested in the article may prove valuable for Christian leaders in their efforts to reach HAs for Christ and to retain them in the church.

Notes

1The U.S. federal system uses terms “Hispanic” and “Latino” interchangeably (Strum & Selee 2004:35). This document adopts the U.S. federal system’s mode of identification to refer to the Spanish-speaking people in the U.S. “The term Latino is widely preferred in California and Hispanic is the more usual term in Florida and Texas. In these regions, however, usage is often mixed and it is not uncommon to find both terms used by the same writer or speaker.” For a brief and stimulating discussion of the use of these two terms, see <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/Hispanic>

2PMC at Andrews University has been nicknamed Pillows, Mattress, and Covers; not Pioneer Memorial Church, by students who do not attend worship service on Sabbath morning.
Works Cited


Sanchez, Daniel. 2006. *Hispanic Realities Impacting America: Implications for Evangelism and Missions*. Fort Worth, TX: Church Starting Network.


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