*De la Iglesia a Servir el Pueblo**: The Role of Religious Leaders in Serving Latino Immigrant Families

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Abstract: *Without initial resources and support in place for newcomer immigrant families, municipalities and service providers in new destination communities struggle to address social, economic, and educational needs of Latino immigrants and their families. The present study explored the role of churches and religious leaders in addressing the social, economic, and educational needs of Latino families in an emerging immigrant destination community. The study draws from in-depth interviews with five Latino religious leaders (e.g., Catholic priests and evangelical pastors) and Catholic laity. Thematic analysis was used to identify themes in the narrative data. Results illustrate Latino churches and religious leaders provided religious social capital (e.g., information, social and spiritual support) and served as cultural and language brokers (e.g., interpreter of language and culture). This study provides important implications and recommendations for social workers on how they can partner with religious leaders to serve Latino immigrant families in a timely, effective, and culturally sensitive manner.*

Keywords: *Latino immigrant families, Latino religious leaders, emerging immigrant destinations, functions of the Latino church, religious social capital, COVID-19*

The recent migration shift of Latino immigrants in the United States spurred the growth and mobility of people from traditionally established immigrant communities to new destinations. Definitions of immigrant destinations range in the literature, with different geographic and demographic factors used to determine such communities. Traditional immigrant, or gateway destinations, are those with a longstanding presence of immigrants since the 1970s (Brown et al., 2018; Singer, 2004; Turner et al., 2016). New-growth, or emerging Latino destinations, are umbrella terms referring to places in which the ethnic and racial composition of the population changed due to a rapid growth in the Latino community in the last two decades (Brown et al., 2018; Singer, 2004; Turner et al., 2016). Trends in migration show a significant increase in Latino immigrants settling in U.S. cities without any previously established Latino community presence, particularly in Southern, Northeastern, and Midwestern states (Ennis et al., 2011; Lichter & Johnson, 2009). The geographical distribution of Latino immigrants across less-populated states is attributable to the evolving demographics of the nation, influenced by immigration, migration, and childbearing factors (Turner et al., 2016). North Carolina, Georgia, and Tennessee had

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some of the fastest Latino immigrant growth between 1990 to 2010 (Turner et al., 2016). The small city in this study, located in Northern Indiana, reflected similar demographic shifts, with a steady increase in the Latino population from 24% in 2010 to 26.7% in 2019 (U.S Census Bureau, 2019). Congruent with previous findings, about 50% of the adults who immigrated to this city in northern Indiana were young couples between 24-40 years old, many with U.S.-born children in their homes (U.S Census Bureau, 2019). Student demographic profiles significantly shifted in the school district in the last ten years due to this mobilization. Student profiles went from 40% Latino children in 2010 to 54.5% Hispanic in 2020 and within this Latino population nearly a quarter were English learners in 2019-2020 (Indiana Department of Education, 2020).

Economic opportunities, specifically the recreational vehicle manufacturing industry, attracted immigrant families to this region, further "browning the Midwest" a term describing a simultaneous decline of the European-American population and an increase of Latinos (Guzman et al., 2011). Despite growing economic prosperity in these regions, often due to the influx of Latinos that allows for cheaper labor, Latino immigrants in emerging cities are still at higher risk of poverty than U.S.-born Latinos. This is partly due to limited English literacy, low formal education levels, and a lack of documentation, which allows for exploitation (Crowley et al., 2006; Lichter & Johnson, 2009). Research documents that, although half of Latino immigrants who move to emerging communities come from traditional gateway destinations, new-growth settlements often lack the social service infrastructure to provide support and security to the influx of the Latino population (Negi et al., 2013; Turner et al., 2016).

Without initial resources and support in place to offer this incoming population, municipalities and service providers struggle to address social, economic, and educational needs of Latino immigrants and their families (Sanchez et al., 2019). Previous studies found that religious institutions play an important role in providing tangible and intangible resources (e.g., financial resources, translation, transportation, information, etc.) to newcomer Latino immigrant families when local social services are unavailable or insufficient (Coddou, 2017; Sanchez et al., 2019). However, there is a lack of research available that describes the specific roles churches and religious leaders play in emerging immigration destinations with minimal service infrastructure. Similarly, little is known about the unique roles of the church which shifted as the emerging immigrant destination developed stronger social service infrastructure and immigrant families became more established in the community. The present study contributes to the limited body of knowledge concerning the role of Latino churches and religious leaders in addressing the social, economic, and educational needs of Latino immigrant families in an emerging immigrant destination community in the Midwest and how the role has changed. This study provides important implications for social workers about partnering with religious leaders to serve Latino immigrant families in a timely, effective, and culturally-sensitive manner.

Literature Review

Emerging Latino Communities and Social Service Infrastructure

A wealth of literature points to structural and environmental barriers, such as documentation status and language disparities, as continuous challenges that discourage Latino newcomers from seeking and receiving social services, and likewise deter service providers from otherwise engaging with this population (Negi et al., 2018a; Raffaelli & Wiley, 2012). Latino communities often fear detainment, deportation, and separation of family members when seeking out social and health systems for support (Ayon, 2013; Negi et al., 2018a; Potok, 2017). In addition, the previous administration of President Trump exacerbated these fears and barriers (Negi et al., 2018a; Potok, 2017). Although immigrants nationwide are impacted by these policies, the fear and barriers provoked by these policies may be exacerbated in new destination places that have not been a home to immigrant populations, particularly Latino immigrants (Lichter & Johnson, 2009).

Research on the impact of increased Latino populations on emerging immigrant destinations is limited. However, previous studies highlight a multitude of socioeconomic, cultural, and historical factors that differentiate between emerging and established immigrant communities. Higher poverty rates and lower education levels exist in emerging destinations which is congruent with the profile of new immigrants seeking low-skill opportunities (Shihadeh & Winters, 2010). Immigrants arriving in emerging destinations may settle in outside neighborhoods, invisible to institutions that govern the city's social services (Winders, 2012). Institutional visibility or awareness of immigrants contributes to the decision-making and responsiveness from local government and non-government officials in immigrant communities (Winders, 2012). Without an established immigrant community, these cities may not offer social services accessible to immigrants and may endorse restrictive immigration policies (Negi et al., 2018b). Immigrant-serving organizations often serve as a protective factor for newcomer immigrants; however, they are often not established in emerging Latino communities.

Previous research recommends that in the absence of immigrant-serving organizations, social workers should identify community stakeholders who have already earned the trust of immigrants. Local congregations across different faith traditions are one of the stakeholder groups Latino immigrants trust in new destinations and that have previously partnered with social workers to provide services to immigrants (Negi et al., 2018a). The social work profession has a long history of supporting immigrant and refugee populations, which was established during the U.S. settlement house movement in the late 1800s (Rine, 2018). This focus has become formalized through different iterations of the Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW). Faith-based organizations also have a long history in the United States in supporting immigrant communities, most notably through the sanctuary movement (Stolz Chinchilla et al., 2009). Thus, a partnership between these entities is natural for strengthening the safety net available to immigrants in emerging immigrant communities.

The Role of the Latino Church

Religious Social Capital

The Latino church functions as a highly effective service provider, safety net, and networking center in emerging immigrant communities. It functions as both a conservative organization that provides a connection to cultural and religious norms, rituals, and traditions, as well as an adaptive one that provides access to social and human capital spanning beyond the boundaries of the institution (Cadge & Ecklund, 2007; Cnaan et al., 2003; Enriquez, 2011; Tsang & Tsang, 2015). Latino churches help new immigrants, especially non-English speakers, meet their social, spiritual, and cultural needs. These needs range from communicating in one's first language, having access to spiritual affiliation and belonging, and providing a protected space to perform cultural traditions, rituals, and holidays (Coddou, 2017; Delgado & Humm-Delgado, 1982; Enriquez, 2011; Sanchez et al., 2019; Tsang & Tsang, 2015). They provide settlement services such as needs assessments, orientation, referral information and assistance, as well as crisis intervention and other emergency services (Tsang & Tsang, 2015).

Latino churches also provide tangible and intangible resources such as adaptation support, leadership opportunities, emotional and legal sanctuary, and access to cultural brokers that help them navigate the realities of dealing with racism (Tsang & Tsang, 2015). Cultural brokers are leaders within the community who have strong ties to outside organizations and systems and help local communities and new members adapt to the influx of Latino and Hispanic immigrants to rural communities (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011; Shiffman, 2019). Specific examples of adaptation support provided by churches include providing food, clothing, furniture, childcare, and assistance with college scholarships; visiting people in their homes; helping them find work; navigating immigration paperwork; caring for the sick, elderly, and disable;, providing financial assistance, housing, and rehabilitation services; providing access to transportation; and providing pastoral counseling and other mental health services (Delgado & Humm-Delgado, 1982; Sanchez et al., 2019). Access to these supports and services may improve the lives of Latino immigrants as they adapt to their new, often unwelcoming, destination environments in the United States.

The distribution of religious social capital within the Latino church is quite apparent in Latino communities. Religious social capital is defined as social resources gained from being a member of a religious community (Sanchez et al., 2019). The social resources provided by religious institutions often result from the dedication and outreach of religious leaders. Religious leaders include priests, deacons, vicars, pastors, and lay leaders (Coddou, 2017). Lay leaders may be volunteers or church staff such as administrative assistants and religious education coordinators who take on a leadership role (Coddou, 2017). Effective religious leaders in the Latino community are often bilingual, making them well-suited to develop connections and relationships with both the Latino community and community organizations. They act as cultural brokers for both members and nonmembers and often serve as community liaisons who bridge gaps between the needs of the community and available services (Coddou, 2017; Delgado & Humm-Delgado, 1982).

These partnerships are especially beneficial for under-resourced emerging Latino communities and were even more important during the COVID pandemic (Cadge & Ecklund, 2007; Sanchez et al., 2019; Sobon Sensor, 2019). In short, the Latino church continues to be a beacon in helping Latino families adapt to their new environments.

Another aspect of religious social capital is that it can be a vessel for political mobilization (Cadge & Ecklund, 2007; Coddou, 2017). Leaders and members within the Latino church often advocate and empower immigrants by teaching them about policies that impact them, how to organize for social change, and how to take civic actions through advocacy and volunteer work (Cadge & Ecklund, 2007; Coddou, 2017; Tsang & Tsang, 2015). This type of religious social capital can provide leadership opportunities that create a renewed sense of self-worth along with opportunities to function as cultural brokers (Tsang & Tsang, 2015).

Cultural Brokers

The cultural needs of bilingual or Spanish-speaking Latino community members are often met through the boundary spanning abilities of cultural brokers. Without cultural brokers, integration is often delayed. New members of supportive ethnic churches are often hesitant to venture beyond the boundaries of the institution and tend to self-segregate, which can lead to prolonged marginalization (Tsang & Tsang, 2015). Cultural brokers help facilitate the difficult transitions many first-generation Latino immigrants experience as they integrate from the safe space of the Latino church into often inhospitable systems. A cultural broker's ability to navigate systems within and outside of the Latino church can empower new members to take on leadership roles of their own and find greater footholds in society that go beyond the influence of the church (Tsang & Tsang, 2015). Cultural brokers make the invisible visible by helping community members span the boundaries from no services to services, and from the strange to the familiar. This literature review was critical to understanding the lack of research on the importance of the role Latino religious leaders and serving Latino families and communities in the Midwest. The current study focused on understanding the intersections of Latino religious leaders and the needs of Latino immigrant communities.

Methods

The present study utilized a qualitative research design with the aim of understanding religious leaders' role in serving immigrant Latino families. The guiding questions for this study were : 1) What is the role of Latino churches and religious leaders in addressing the social, spiritual, economic, and educational needs of Latino immigrant families? and 2) How has the role of the church and religious leaders changed over time?

Sample and Procedures

The sample in this study consisted of five Latino religious leaders: two Catholic laity, one Catholic priest, and two Evangelical pastors. The profiles below summarize their pivotal role in the reception and adaptation of Latino immigrants with the variety of

supports they provided. The profiles provide information regarding the religious leaders' own background as immigrants and how it has helped them connect to the situations of the Latino immigrants in the Northern Indiana area. Pseudonyms were used to maintain the confidentiality of the participants. Snowball sampling was used to recruit study participants. The first step in the recruitment process involved the researchers developing relationships with community members, who then identified who should be interviewed. Thus, the community informed which religious leaders and lay leaders, both protestant and Catholic of Latino descent, should be part of the study. The interviews took place in June 2020.

Pastor Lara

Pastor Lara and his wife were born in Mexico and moved to northern Indiana in 1988. Pastor Lara had a vision and felt a calling to start a church that would serve the Latino community in the region. In 2003 he founded a radio station ministry to serve God by serving the Latino community. In addition to transmitting Spanish Christian music and programming, they also transmitted other educational programming to inform the Latino community about other topics including education, immigration policies and law, health, mental health, and social services. Pastor Lara played a crucial role in providing basic supportive services to newcomer Latino families when they first arrived.

Father Hernandez

Father Hernandez's family immigrated from Mexico to Indiana in 1999. He transferred to a seminary in Indiana in 2000 to join his family and complete his studies for the priesthood. Father Hernandez arrived in Indiana with permanent resident status as a green card holder. He later moved to Boston to take English language classes and complete his seminary studies. He studied English for three years and found learning the language a challenge. He was ordained as a priest in 2009. Father Hernandez later pursued a master's degree at Notre Dame in non-profit management in the Business Administration program. His immigration story contrasted with those of many Latino immigrants in Indiana for whom getting to Indiana and adapting to life in the US had been a struggle. Father Hernandez learned about those struggles through the stories of his parishioners.

Pastor Martinez

Pastor Martinez moved to northern Indiana in 1987, when the Latino population numbered approximately 1,000. He was familiar with the area because he had previously visited the city where the study took place on several occasions to visit his in-laws. Pastor Martinez worked for a year before he was selected to be pastor of a church in northern Indiana. He lived there from 1998 to 2004. He moved to northern Indiana in 2004 and started another church there. His church membership is comprised of Latino immigrants from various countries.

Esperanza

Esperanza is a lay leader who has lived in northern Indiana for 33 years. She immigrated with her husband to the United States from Mexico in 1986. Esperanza and her husband were dentists and Esperanza had practiced dentistry in Mexico for ten years. Esperanza learned humility, faith, and mercy from the immigrants she worked with in northern Indiana who came from small villages in Mexico. She empathized with the immigrants from small villages because she lived and worked as a dentist in several rural clinics in Mexico. Much like them, Esperanza arrived in the U.S. without English language skills. But unlike Mexican immigrants from the rural areas, she did not arrive with undocumented status and has not faced similar struggles. Esperanza used her English language skills to support immigrants and employed her organizing skills to make the church a welcoming place for immigrants

Sofia

Sofia was born in Mexico and immigrated with her family to northern Indiana when she was 11. She was unaware of her undocumented status growing up and only learned about it when she applied to college. She qualified for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals status (known as DACA) and graduated from a Catholic college in the region in May 2012 with a bachelor's degree in Communications. Like other Dreamers, she did not receive public financial aid and paid for college with a private scholarship, her own work, and the support of her parents. All of her 14 siblings are also college graduates. After Sofia graduated from college she commuted to Chicago on a weekly basis to complete a master's degree. Sofia's experience as a youth lay leader helped her develop leadership skills she later used in college. She continued her service in the Catholic church when she attended college where she served as a lector and Eucharistic minister. On her return trips to her hometown as an undergraduate student, Sofia shared with her former youth group her college experiences, explained the college application process, and encouraged them to accomplish their goals.

Data Collection and Protocol

The researchers used an ethnographic study design to conduct the study with religious leaders serving Latino families in the region. The focus of the larger study was to understand the family life and the role of families in education of their children. n this inquiry theI focus was to understand the role of leaders in the Latino community, especially religious leaders. The interviews were semi-structured, individual interviews and lasted approximately one hour. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, the interviews were conducted over zoom.

The protocol was based on the previous literature that focused on immigrant Latino families and school systems (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992). The larger ethnographic study addressed the relationship between the school, community, and the immigrant Latino families, cultural and language issues affecting the families and the schools, parental involvement, visibility of the schools in the Latino community, and the strengths and

challenges of the families. Specifically, in this part of the study the interviews addressed the role of Latino religious leaders with immigrant Latino families and communities. The interview protocol was also based on the authors' combined over 60 years of research experience with Latino communities. Five of the authors are of Latino background, biliterate in Spanish and English, and with extensive experience working with Latino families and communities in numerous states in the United States, Mexico, and Central America. The fifth author had also worked with Latino communities and is semi-bilingual in Spanish. All these factors provided a foundation to conduct a culturally and linguistically responsive research study. Participants were provided with informed consent forms that stated their voluntary participation and right to stop the interview at any time. The interviews were conducted in the preferred language of the participant (Spanish or English). All interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed by bilingual Spanish-speaking researchers and translated to English for publication purposes. Participants did not receive any material incentives for their collaboration. The study was approved by the university's and school district's Institutional Review Board.

Data Analysis

The researchers used a thematic approach to analyze the narrative data from the in-depth interviews. One of the first steps of the analysis process was to identify a preliminary list of codes during the initial reading of the transcripts. The researchers categorized the data into codes to create a manual codebook, recording the definition of the code and memo notes as an audit trail. In the second step, one of the researchers reviewed the data and codebook, evaluating the preliminary coding category system (Abbott, 2004). This methodical process and trail supported transparency, trustworthiness, and transferability (Padgett, 2008). The researchers used an iterative and inductive team process to determine themes that emerged across the multiple interviews. The themes and concepts emerged from the pattern codes. The team of researchers provided meaning to themes by analyzing the primary and contextual data and reviewing memo notes to ensure key points and/or overemphasized points were not missed.

Findings

The findings are presented under two overarching themes. The first, Religious Social Capital: *Refugio*, revealed the role of religious leaders in providing refuge and social support, leadership development, and advice. The second theme, *Padrinos de la Comunidad*, examined the role of religious leaders as cultural and language brokers who provided supportive services and partnered with organizations to help Latino immigrant families access additional resources. The second theme includes a section that specifically examined religious leaders as cultural and language brokers during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

Religious Social Capital: *Refugio* (Refuge) and Social Support

Religious social capital is defined as the resources resulting from membership in a religious community (Sanchez et al., 2019). Latino churches (both Catholic and evangelical) were acknowledged as one of the first places where Latino families gained membership regardless of their immigration status. Esperanza, a lay leader who resided in northern Indiana for over 30 years noted that Latinos were not originally welcomed. Some people were particularly prejudiced against Mexicans and Catholics. She stated:

> *When I told the people "Oh, I'm from Mexico," because I'm so proud to be Mexican and they would said "Ugh, are you from Mexico?". And then when I would tell them "Oh I'm Catholic, I go to (name of church)". And they said, "Ohhh you are Catholic". So I didn't have an idea that Catholics and Mexicans were not very welcomed in this area. Through the years, I noticed that the people here in this area are very conservative and prejudiced to this thing. Not all of them.*

According to Esperanza, during the 1980s, Catholic churches made membership difficult for Latino immigrants due to the absence of Spanish-language masses in the area. However, through Esperanza's efforts, 100 signatures were collected at *bailes* (dances) or other social gatherings to obtain permission from the bishop for a Cuban priest to celebrate Mass in Spanish. Spanish masses have now been available to Latino parishioners in the county for over 30 years. Esperanza described the church as a second home. She invested immense time and effort to make the church a welcoming place for other Mexican immigrants through her organizing skills and English abilities.

> *So for me, the church was my second house. It was my home and where I could connect with other Latinos. So I did that. I participated in the festival, committees, the pastoral Council, and the Health Committee from the church.*

Esperanza's networks among service providers grew because of her work for the dioceses which took her across northern Indiana. She gained the social capital necessary to advocate for Latino immigrants and to connect them to different resources.

> *It was the pastoral leadership training that gave me the opportunity to know more Latinos in the northern part of Indiana state. I used to go to different cities in northern Indiana to have those Bible studies and retreats. And as a result of that opportunity, I met a lot of people, and because before I was a director for the Hispanic Outreach Program, I had a lot of connections, so I could advocate for the Latino population in this area to get connected with social services. Sometimes it was hard because some of the people did not and don't have legal documentation, so it was hard. But thanks to the connections I made, sometimes these people would get help.*

Pastor Martinez also described his church's role in providing social support and basic resources to Latino immigrant families. He considered his church a safe place for Latino immigrants which was reflected in its name, "Refugio" (refuge). He discussed the role of his church in providing hope and support to Latino immigrants in need regardless of their immigration status:

> *For example, with food, many people would ask, "why don't Latino families go to the Salvation Army to get food, why don't they go to the food banks?" Number one, because of the language; there are people who don't speak English. Number two, because they are afraid that they will be told, "show me your papers; if you don't show me your papers, I won't give you anything." They know that the church is a refuge; we won't ask them for papers, we speak the same language, we have the same culture; thus, we create more trust.*

This example illustrates how the church served as a refuge for mixed-status families. Families knew they could obtain resources at the church without having to present proof of citizenship.

Leadership Development

Sofia, a lay leader, noted that the leadership skills she used in college originally resulted from volunteering at her Catholic church. She started volunteering during her freshman year of high school. She volunteered in the choir, served as a lector, and helped clean the building. She also served as the lay leader in her church youth group, organizing fund-raising activities such as selling food and organizing car washes. Sofia was inspired by her experiences to share her knowledge with other undocumented high school and college students in her church:

> *It was definitely great. It was just an amazing experience to be able to develop skills that I was later on able to use in college. It just gave me a lot of empowerment, it gave me a lot of confidence, and definitely increased my faith. I became a lot more grateful for what I was accomplishing and receiving. It also inspired me to not only keep it to myself, but also relay that to other individuals, especially in my situation, not having a legal status and then wanting to accomplish so much. So it gave me a sense of encouragement, strength, I wanna say, confidence definitely.*

On her return trips to her hometown as an undergraduate student, Sofia shared her college experiences with her former church youth group. She explained the college application process and encouraged them to accomplish their goals. Sofia was an example of a Latina from the area that developed leadership skills in church and used that religious social capital to support other Latino youth in their college aspirations. As a first-generation college graduate who was educated in the region, she served as a role model for other Latino youth.

Advice

Fr. Hernandez, a priest in a Catholic parish, provided spiritual support and advice to Latino families in his church. Latino parishioners trusted priests and opened their hearts to them. They shared their concerns with them even when the concerns were not religious. For example, families sought advice on important matters such as buying a house.

> *So I always tell them when you go to buy your house. I try to direct them and the little things that I have learned is that first you get to know the person that will help you buy the house, but then I go through the little details, when you get a loan, make sure that it is a loan that will be, oh man, I forgot the word right now. That the rate will not change, that the interest will stay the same. Fixed rate. That means that you will always pay the same. Otherwise, you can get a very low rate right now, like one or two, but if it is variable, it can happen that in two or three years it will move from one to 18 for example.*

Latino churches were one of the first places families gained membership and developed social connections. Churches offered refuge to Latino families and they felt comfortable seeking advice and resources from religious leaders. Thus, *refugio* did not solely refer to a physical space, but to religious social capital made available to Latino immigrants regardless of their immigration status.

***Padrinos de la Comunidad*: Cultural and Language Brokering**

The second theme that emerged from the study identified Latino religious leaders as the *Padrinos de la Comunidad*, or as the Godparents of the community. As Godparents, they supported Latino newcomers during their transition by serving as language and cultural brokers. They assisted newly arrived immigrants in adapting to their new surroundings by providing both supportive services such as translation and serving as liaisons and advocates to help families secure resources.

Supportive Services

Religious leaders provided supportive services including translation, transportation, employment assistance, lodging, and financial assistance. Religious leaders also served as cultural language brokers by providing interpretation and other services to Latino families when they first arrived. For example, Pastor Lara and his wife described how they interpreted for many immigrant Latino families in different settings including the local jail, court hearings, and hospitals. Esperanza, a lay leader in a local Catholic parish, also interpreted for people seeking public assistance, social services, or during doctor's appointments.

> *I started with the father of the church. He put me as a volunteer to translate for the welfare office. So when someone had an appointment in the welfare office, they would give them a list of people, among them was me. That's where I started, helping people translate, as a volunteer in 2000 with social services. In the morning, I went to court with a lady to place a restraining order on her partner, and I accompanied her, but I did not charge her, she is in the shelter, she does not work.*

In addition to providing interpretation, religious leaders also provided transportation to recently arrived immigrant families who lacked a car or did not have a driver's license. Esperanza also provided transportation to families seeking social services and other basic needs. Pastor Lara provided transportation to families seeking employment and drove them

to work. He also provided transportation within Indiana and occasionally out of state for immigration appointments or when someone had been detained by immigration authorities.

Pastor Lara specifically discussed how he provided a range of supportive services to newcomers including helping them find employment and housing. This particular pastor provided housing to recently arrived families until they could transition to their own apartment. He drove them to work and provided food until they were able to make it on their own.

> *Well, here at home we have someone every year or every 6 months. People who have nowhere to stay here, we have had them. We have helped them get a job or get an apartment to keep them going. But we are always here at home helping people to live with us, who have nowhere to stay. People who have been thrown out of the house who have lost their apartment where they lived or who cannot pay the rent of an apartment. So we have a big house and here they come while they regain their strength. We help them to get a job, we get up at dawn to take them to their jobs. We pick them up from their jobs and we have their food ready for them and we do not charge them anything but we do hope that they can move on and can work and have their own apartment. Then they leave our home when they have their own apartment, they have a car, they have something to be able to make it on their own. And they can make it on their own. So that's what we have done. It's not just about having pity or praying for them…. so what we have been doing for them to this day.*

This type of support was not uncommon among religious leaders. Other pastors also spoke about providing financial assistance to recently arrived Latino families who lacked basic necessities.

In addition to providing support services to newly arrived families, religious leaders were also cultural brokers who served as liaisons between families and service providers, non-profit organizations, or law enforcement agencies. Pastor Lara spoke of how local law enforcement officers trusted him and his wife and even called them to help resolve domestic disputes among immigrant families. Pastor Lara also had a radio station that belonged to the church. They used this radio station to provide families information in a culturally relevant and safe space. On one occasion pastors, lawyers, and law enforcement officers provided information and made it possible for families to ask questions in a safe context.

> *A lawyer went to the church to let church members know that if anyone has a need for this, I am here to help them, or to answer questions such about what can we do if we get stopped by a policeman…. what they should say and what not to say. There are many ways of how to help …. and right now, last week a person spoke to me who wants to bring a police officer to the radio so that he can be on the radio and Latino families can ask questions.*

In her role as a cultural broker, Esperanza advocated for undocumented immigrants so they could obtain resources. Sometimes they received them "under the table" after Esperanza's intervention on their behalf:

> *But for our people without that state ID it's very hard, so we have to organize ourselves to help them, to see how we're going to do it all together…For example, in the Salvation Army, to get some Christmas baskets or some help, they always ask for a state ID, so one of the persons who works in there was my co-worker, at (name of organization), and she knew how we struggle and she knew how most of the Latinos are hard workers. She said, "okay we are going to make an exception, we are going to help the people, we only need a matricula, the Mexican ID, or passport, or another different ID, because they don't have a state ID." So that was very good. It was a good opportunity to help the Latino population in this area.*

Esperanza helped organizations understand the legitimacy of the alternative documents Latinos used. Due to her advocacy, some organizations eventually accepted the other forms of identification that Latinos carried.

Continuing Needs in an Established Immigrant Community

The types of language and cultural brokering services religious leaders provided to the Latino community has evolved over the years. In the early years, much of the assistance was interpretation, transportation, and other basic needs. Presently, Latino families have older children who can interpret for them and public offices have bilingual personnel. Latino families also tend to be doing better off financially now and some are even buying their own homes. The number of bilingual Latino leaders and professionals in the community has grown. Pastor Martinez pointed out the example of a Latino school board member and a city council member. Latinos also now occupy positions in non-profit organizations, public education, and in local law enforcement. Pastor Martinez testifies to that change:

> *There has been change because the people used to seek a lot of help: "Send me someone who can translate or who can interpret for me." This has changed because if the families need help, they will take their children. In addition, there are many places that already have bilingual people such as doctors and dentist offices and in the license branch to get a license there are bilingual people. All of that helps so that people don't ask us for help in translation.*

Esperanza also noted that in contrast to the past, Latino students from the area now have bachelor's and graduate college degrees and occupy professional and civic positions in the area. In the past, religious and lay leaders served as interpreters. Now, different organizations such as hospitals, clinics, and schools have translators on staff. One of the biggest changes Father Hernandez saw across time is the positive economic, educational, and cultural adaptation of the second and third generation of Latino young people. He pointed to their bilingualism, biculturalism, higher education achievements, and careers as professionals as examples:

> *One of the big changes that I have noticed is that this second or third generation has adapted much better to the United States in every respect. Financially, culturally, academically, everything. For example, most of the families are from Jalisco, and they are now second or third generations and of the changes I have*

seen is that kids are now educated, they speak English, and they grew up in this culture. So they embrace both cultures. They speak Spanish, they speak English.

Despite the positive changes Father Hernandez and other religious leader have seen, one challenge that has remained constant is the undocumented immigration status of many Latino immigrants. Religious leaders identified the lack of driver's licenses as an example of the struggles undocumented immigrants continue to face.

In another example of cultural brokering, Father Hernandez hosted community meetings with the police department to address the lack of trust between the Latino community and the police. Latino immigrants did not feel safe reporting crimes to the police, particularly undocumented immigrants because they were afraid of being found out and deported. As a result, a network of Latino and English-speaking churches was established to address police discrimination against Latinos. Father Hernandez spoke about the distrust and discrimination that occurred in 2006:

But years ago, there was also the feeling that the community were not trusting the police. And so that there was a big problem, especially when there are crimes that need to be reported and some immigrants were afraid to do that or they thought that they needed to have a green card or a license to report a crime. So we had a workshop in which the police came and explained everything. You know how they all work, how they operated, to grow trust in the community, but also in the police.

Sofia also served as cultural and linguistic broker due to her own experience as a first-generation student who had graduated from college. She figured out how to navigate the higher education system and her bilingualism positioned her well to become a link between the Latino immigrant community and the area of education. Her experience was especially relevant since she had been undocumented when she applied to college:

We did organize different workshops to educate families mainly parents about resources available and scholarships available for their kids to attend college. Especially, undocumented individuals to allow them to know that there were plenty of pathways, or resources for their children to attend college if that was one of their goals. And since I was able to, I guess, open that path, or not, I wasn't the first one to be able to go to college without a residency or social security number, any of that. So I was able to kind of relay information of resources that were available for them to be able to accomplish that if they wanted to.

Sofia benefited from a K-12 education in the small city in northern Indiana, but encountered limited information regarding college access as a high school student. She had to seek out this information on her own from school counselors and became a groundbreaker as a first-generation college student who was undocumented and eventually received DACA status. Sofia contrasted the college access workshops she helped organize with the lack of information she encountered as a high school student:

When I started looking into opportunities for higher education, to attend college, I myself did not find that information fully through community workshops, or events. It was mainly through our high school counselor that guided me, but now everybody was as you know, coming together as a community or let's share this

information. We just found this scholarship, let's send it to the families most in need or what not…. I've seen a lot more of, okay, let's put a college night together.

Across time, college-access community workshops in the region where local universities directly communicated with parents and students became regular events and were supported by community groups such as a radio station. Sofia stated:

One of the things that [a small college in northern Indiana] and other universities did was to bring all these resources to the families that didn't have that information, empowered them, or motivated them to help their students … and opened that information channel to the parents. It started as a Latino college night and then it later on developed to having a radio segment, or an episode of informing the community about all the requirements, the resources, and the process to apply to college, and obtain all kinds of scholarships available.

Latino religious leaders continued to serve as cultural and language brokers, particularly for undocumented immigrant families. They were able to provide information to families particularly related to sensitive issues related to undocumented status since Latino families felt safe receiving this information from the church.

Cultural and Language Brokering During the Covid-19 Pandemic

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Pastor Martinez and his church served as cultural brokers by delivering important information to the Latino immigrant community. For example, they provided public health information in Spanish on face masks to encourage the use of face masks in the Latino community. Pastor Martinez felt that the church had a common culture and language with the Latino immigrant community and would be considered a more trustworthy source of information than a law enforcement or public health agency:

If neither of the two people wears a face mask, we have 90% possibilities of getting infected. If one of the two wears a face mask, it decreases to 60% -70%. But if both of them are wearing a mask, there is only a 5% probability that one will become infected. We have been sharing this information with the Hispanic community, and it is better well received from the church than law enforcement or a doctor, because the doctors say the same thing, but the Hispanic community says that doctors say it because they are doctors. But if they receive this information from the Hispanic church, it is better received since we share the same language and culture.

The COVID-19 pandemic showed that even though Latino immigrant families had adapted well over the years and there was a more established infrastructure in the community, undocumented status continued to make immigrant families very vulnerable during these types of crises. Churches and religious leaders still played an important role in responding to the unique needs of immigrant families during the pandemic. Specifically, churches were relaying information in a culturally relevant manner and providing basic necessities to mixed-status families who did not qualify for CARES Act benefits and other

government assistance (e.g., unemployment benefits and stimulus checks). They were able to help many Latino immigrant families access resources:

> *There is a new Spanish radio station here in the city. The radio station started a food and supply drive to distribute to people who were unemployed, because a lot of people lost their jobs and the factories closed. Those who are documented were receiving assistance from the government, but the undocumented they did not qualify for it, nor for unemployment, so really more than 50% of the people were in need. We prepared for 8 families the first Saturday, to give them food; however, 50 families showed up looking for food. So for the second Saturday, we prepared for 50 and 70 families appeared looking for food, for the third, we prepared for 70, and 75 showed up. We were only one of the distribution points.*

A church network was also established to distribute food and face masks during the COVID 19 pandemic. Father Hernandez described the work of this network in providing support during the COVID 19 pandemic:

> *We created a compound for people who are in need, to support their pantry. We created a Facebook page with all the information and especially telling people, those who are isolated, praying with them over the phone. Or we also offered services, and okay, someone, especially the elders, who need groceries or help picking up their medicine, we offer that service to them. It was kind of an association that we created with a few churches in town to have sufficient resources for the food pantry, but also to provide the spiritual help that our parish, our people would need during uncertain times. So that was something that I was very active because I saw a great need in that.*

The assistance to the Latino community during the COVID-19 pandemic was facilitated by networks comprised of Latino and English-speaking churches. Pastor Martinez and Father Hernandez recruited network partners from English-speaking churches and were better able secure resources through these partnerships.

As illustrated through these examples, religious leaders played a pivotal role as language and cultural brokers over the years. They supported families when they first arrived in the small city in northern Indiana by interpreting for families in different settings including court hearings, department of motor vehicles, doctor's appointments, and applying for social services. Over the years, these city and state agencies developed an infrastructure to serve Latino families in culturally and linguistically supportive ways. More bilingual Latino leaders and professionals in the community now work for organizations that provide services to Latino families. Latino parents also now rely on their grown children who are bilingual to provide interpretation. Thus, the need for religious leaders to provide interpretations services has decreased substantially over the years. However, Latino religious leaders continue to provide information to families that is more well-received due to sharing a common language and culture in a church setting where families feel safe. Finally, religious leaders continue to play a crucial role in providing services during specific crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic for families who experience many challenges due to their undocumented immigration status.

Discussion and Implications

The findings of this study supported previous findings that Latino churches were one of the first places where Latino immigrant families felt a sense of belonging (Delgado & Humm-Delgado, 1982; Sanchez et al., 2019). Latino churches were especially important in the city where the study took place since it was an emerging community that lacked supportive Latino community groups and bilingual and culturally responsive community-based social service organizations. Religious leaders had to identify the gap in the emergent Latino community and locate resources and assistance normally provided by non-profits or other community organizations. Latino religious/lay leaders located additional resources beyond those provided by their churches by acting as cultural and language brokers (Shiffman, 2019). They networked and partnered with community organizations, and helped Latino families navigate organizations. The importance of religious social capital for Latino communities had been previously noted, and in the current study supported the development of lay leaders who expanded the work of the religious leaders (Sanchez et al., 2019). The lay leaders in this study were effective as cultural brokers because they were bilingual Latinos from the region and represented the work of churches (Shiffman, 2019). While the role of religious social capital in the Latino community has been previously noted, its unique role in fostering the development of lay leaders of emergent communities was illustrated by the stories of Sofia and Esperanza.

These findings suggest Latino churches and religious leaders play an important role in providing support to Latino families in emerging Latino immigrant communities as well as the need to build their capacity. Even though the need for services such as translation and basic resources might decrease over time, Latino churches and religious leaders continue to play a critical role in providing information, advocacy, and resources during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. They also help meet the specific needs of mixed-status families who are not eligible for governmental resources. In particular, social workers employed by community-based, non-profit, and faith-based organizations are encouraged to work with Latino churches and religious leaders to identify and address challenges immigrant families experience, including linguistic and cultural factors that shape the effectiveness of different interventions (Sherr & Wolfer, 2003, 2004). Social workers, with their expertise in providing case management, can also offer churches assistance in organizing cases and making referrals. Social work professionals can also support religious leaders in providing leadership development training and other types of workshops to lay leaders and church members/parishioners, strengthening their capacity to reach immigrant families.

The interviews with religious leaders also suggest that Latino immigrant families are sometimes hesitant to seek resources from community organizations due to cultural barriers and fear of being asked about their immigration status. Immigrant families seem to trust Latino churches, suggesting that community organizations must increase their collaborations with Latino churches and religious leaders to overcome this hesitancy and help provide information, resources, and trainings to Latino immigrant families in a timely, culturally sensitive, and effective manner. This is consistent with previous research that recommends that social workers in new destination communities that lack immigrant-

serving organizations, should partner with community stakeholders trusted by immigrants including local congregations of different faith groups (Negi et al., 2018a). New destination communities often lack linguistically and culturally relevant services. Social workers who have linguistic skills to meet the needs of the immigrant community are frequently overworked (Negi et al., 2018b). To maximize the few existing resources in new destination cities, partnerships between social workers and local congregations might be particularly helpful. Future research is needed to specifically explore how social workers, faith-based leaders, and other community stakeholders can collaborate to increase the access of immigrant families to social services in new destination communities in the greater Midwest.

Conclusion

In this study the role of religious leaders as cultural brokers and sources of cultural capital were used to address the social, economic, and educational needs of the Latino community. Latino churches provided the types of assistance normally associated with houses of worship such as food pantries. But equally important was providing a welcoming place of refuge at a time when few public gathering places existed for Latinos. Churches provided a sense of community and belonging without regard to immigration status, language, and culture that was not available in the broader region. The welcome and support offered by Latino churches was received by Latino immigrants at a time when many faced discrimination in the community, including from the police.

Different types of assistance and support were provided by ordained religious leaders as well as lay leaders with a long history in the community. As a lay leader, Esperanza had extensive networks due to her work with the Diocese and non-profits. Sofia had a different type of network due to her public school and university education in the community. The religious leaders had their own networks due to their work as pastors. The religious leaders played a role by developing a welcoming church climate as well as providing Spanish-language ministries. Their contacts with other church leaders, including pastors of English-speaking congregations, proved invaluable in defending the Latino community as well as locating additional assistance and support during the COVID-19 pandemic. In contrast to the religious leaders, the lay leaders operated as volunteers and were able to expand support and assistance for Latino immigrants. The generational, educational, and occupational differences of the religious/lay leaders helped ensure a broad-based network of contacts and relationships that provided needed assistance and support for the Latino immigrant community.

In summary, this paper sought to understand the role of Latino religious leaders with Latino families and communities in the Midwest. Specifically, it is critical for social workers to build partnerships with Latino religious leaders to ensure culturally-responsive outreach and service in Latino communities. Through such partnerships social workers, faith-based leaders, and other stakeholders will be better able to work towards improving the quality of life of Latino immigrant families.

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