

3-24-2003

Religion & ethnic identity among Mexican youths in Homestead, Florida

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DOI: 10.25148/etd.FI14050404

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

RELIGION & ETHNIC IDENTITY AMONG MEXICAN YOUTHS
IN HOMESTEAD, FLORIDA

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN STUDIES

by

Noemi Baez

2003

To: Dean Arthur W. Herriott
College of Arts and Sciences

This thesis, written by Noemi Baez, and entitled Religion & Ethnic Identity among Mexican Youths in Homestead, Florida, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this thesis and recommend that it be approved.

Patricia L. Price

Carlos M. Alvarez

Alex Stepick, Major Professor

Date of Defense: March 24, 2003

The thesis of Noemi Baez is approved.

Dean Arthur W. Herriott
College of Arts and Sciences

Dean Douglas Wartzok
University Graduate School

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my parents and sisters. Without their patience, support, and most of all love, the completion of this work would not have been possible. I would also like to share this thesis with my other half, Carlos Rojas. His unconditional support throughout this process has been most appreciated. But most of all I would like to dedicate this research to the undocumented workers who fight to build better futures for their families. I hope one day your struggle will no longer be undervalued.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank the members of my committee for their support, patience, and guidance. Their gentle but firm direction has been most appreciated. Dr. Patricia Price was extremely helpful with her knowledge of Mexican migrant issues. Dr. Carlos Alvarez's insight on identity formation was the key to understanding the how and why we process ethnic identity. I would like to especially thank my major professor, Dr. Alex Stepick. From the beginning, he had confidence in my abilities to not only complete this thesis, but to do so with excellence. His research methodology is the cornerstone of future works. Last but not least, I would like to express my humble gratitude to Carol Stepick who has been a great teacher and friend. From her advice and guidance, I have developed the tools of the trade, for which I am extremely grateful.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS
RELIGION & ETHNIC IDENTITY AMONG MEXICAN YOUTHS
IN HOMESTEAD, FLORIDA

by

Noemi Baez

Florida International University, 2003

Miami, Florida

Professor Alex Stepick, Major Professor

Immigrant youth are the fastest growing component of the U.S. population and Mexicans are the largest immigrant group in the U.S. The manner in which they integrate into U.S. society and the ways that they become civically engaged, will greatly determine the nature of civil society in the United States over the next few decades. Moreover, religion is increasingly recognized as an important factor in immigrant adaptation. Based upon fieldwork of participant observation and interviews in Homestead, Florida, this thesis examined the relationship among Mexican youths' identity, religion and civic engagement. I found that if these youths are active in religious practices they will be more likely to identify themselves as part of the dominant group, in this case American society. Religious groups are powerful tools that can help these youth reach the greater community.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Research Purpose	2
General Statement of Problem Area	3
Research Problem	3
Significance of Study	4
Theoretical Perspective	6
Research Questions & Hypotheses	6
Methodology	7
Design & Instrumentation	9
Data Analysis	10
II. LITERATURE REVIEW	11
Immigrant Religion	11
Ethnic Identity	14
Immigrant Youth & Theoretical Perspectives	17
Civic Engagement	22
III. THE SETTING	24
Mexicans in Homestead	25
St. Ann's Catholic Church	28
Iglesia Mexicana Pentecostal	33
IV. OBSERVATIONS	39
Youth Group Structures	39
Gender Roles	48
Leadership & Outreach	50
Portraits of Mexican Youths	53
V. BEING MEXICAN	70
Conclusion	83
LIST OF REFERENCES	90
APPENDIX	93

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As a young girl in New York, I grew up amongst dozens of different cultures and identities. I never questioned why there were so many people or why were they so different from each other. I knew who I was and which group I belonged to, because of my parents, who are Puerto Ricans. I never heard the term “ethnic identity” until I went to college where I began a personal struggle to find out who I really was. On one occasion the professor asked the students what we thought ethnic identity meant. I figured, well, it must be my nationality, what group I was part of, nothing more and nothing less. Afterwards, I discovered that it can be and usually is much more complex. Ethnic identity is an important part of the individual’s self, but more generally of the society’s as well.

As part of an undergraduate class project, dozens of students interviewed friends and relatives in search of an answer to what ethnic identity meant to them. Their responses were simple, but multidimensional: culture, nationality, race, and sex. A more academic definition, but still simple is one’s culture, way of life, a set of shared beliefs, history, traditions and customs, religion and norms and values (Alvarez and Fernandez, 2000). This straightforward explanation seems appropriate to answer what ethnic identity is. Yet, society and cultures change and evolve, therefore making the meaning of ethnic identity ever more complex. In the United States dozens of ethnic groups define themselves with the above definition, but what happens with their children who are born and grow up in the U.S.?

Research Purpose

Immigrant youth are the fastest growing sector of U.S. child population (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). How these children integrate into U.S. society, in particular the ways that they become civically engaged, will greatly determine the nature of civil society in the United States over the next few decades (Stepick and Stepick, 2002). By studying how they identify themselves and what are the strongest social factors that help form their identity, we can assess in what ways immigrant youth integrate into the United States.

Many social processes shape identity. One in particular is the focus of this study: religion. Until recently few scholars have examined the role of religion among the latest wave of immigrants. Helen Rose Ebaugh (2000) and Stephen Warner (1998; 1997), among others, have addressed this issue. More recently, the Pew Charitable Trusts have funded a set of studies on immigrants and religion in six cities: New York, Los Angeles, Houston, Chicago, San Francisco and Miami. This thesis emerges from the Miami project, which is based at the Immigration and Ethnicity Institute (IEI) at Florida International University. The primary goal of the Miami Pew project is to “examine the role of religion in the civic life of immigrant and native minority youth in the greater Miami area” (Stepick, Mahler et al., 1999), with a special focus on cultural and social identity formation.

This thesis specifically focuses on Mexican youth in the Homestead area of southern Miami-Dade County. The research addresses the role religion has in identity formation among these youth. I have constructed this thesis to illustrate vital points of the research: religion, Mexican youth and ethnic identity. In this first chapter I will give

a synopsis of what I set out to research and how I went about it. Chapter Two will reflect the literature review on immigrant religion, ethnic identity, and civic engagement. I will highlight main arguments by various scholars and determine if they fit into my hypotheses and argument. Chapter Three provides a background of the area of my research and an in-depth look at the churches that I participated in and the people that I encountered in the course of my research. In Chapter Four I describe what I discovered from months of observation and interviews. And finally, in Chapter Five I will give my argument of why Mexican youths in Homestead, Florida will be more likely to identify themselves as “Mexican” and less likely to participate in the broader Homestead and U.S. civil society.

General Statement of Problem Area

Mexican youths in the United States face a difficult challenge as they try to define who they are in a society where they are almost always confronted with hostility and rejection (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001), which I suspect will lead to low levels of civic engagement. The problem to be examined is how these Mexican youths identify themselves in Homestead, Florida and what role religion plays in their identity formation and civic engagement. Religious groups are fundamental to this study because “they have always played a key role in the integration of immigrants in Miami” (Stepick, et al., 1999). Hence, religious organizations can be a tool to civically engage Mexican immigrant youths in the host society, the United States.

Research Problem

Homestead, Florida is a small community, south of Miami, and home to many Mexican immigrants due to its agricultural employment opportunities. The Mexican

youths chosen for this study are a mix of native-born and second-generation immigrant children whose parents are migrant agricultural, plant nursery, or construction workers. These youths are enrolled in public high schools where they exchange ideas and views with youths from other ethnic backgrounds, reside in an area where “American” culture is dominant, and where they live relatively “American” lives, yet when asked how they choose to identify themselves, they will almost always reply “Mexican.”

From my research in Homestead, Florida I have been able to see how many Mexican youths identify themselves as Mexicans regardless of whether they were born in the U.S. or born in Mexico and have been here for a period of time. Examples of Mexican identification can be seen in the streets of Homestead, which are filled with cars that sport Mexican flags or Virgin of Guadalupe stickers, items which are representative of Mexico. This thesis will address why these youths choose to identify themselves solely as Mexicans. It will also explore the future for these youth in terms of their civic engagement, and what implications this has for the rest of the United States.

Significance of Study

Civic engagement is important because it is the core principle of a democracy. Without civic engagement the future of the country can be at risk of losing the very freedoms that so many have fought for. These immigrant youths are vital to understanding and predicting what the future will hold in terms of leadership and civil society (Gerstle and Mollenkopf, 2001). What will the new social norms be? This key question can be answered by the youth of today and, particularly, the new immigrants.

Adolescence is the most critical stage of identity formation (Stepick and Stepick, 2002). It provides the best setting to analyze how individuals come to define themselves

and how religion affects their developmental identity process. If we can discover how religion influences their identity formation, then we can utilize these organizations to raise the number of Mexican youths participating in civic engagement.

“The Mexican population in the United States is marked by three characteristics that make it unique: Mexicans are the only foreign group that has been part of both the classic period of immigration at the beginning of the twentieth century and the present movement; this geographical contiguity has facilitated both labor recruitment and subsequent mass labor displacements, mediated by social networks; and Mexican immigrants have thus experienced a negative modes of incorporation not only at present but for over 100 years” (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001: 277).

According to recent data issued from the Census 2000, there are 20,640,711 Mexicans in the United States, almost a one hundred percent increase from the 1990 census, which reported 13,495,938 Mexicans in the U.S. Yet apart from their numbers, Mexicans in the U.S. are still struggling with the same issues that have plagued them forty or fifty years ago: undocumented, language barriers, bad working conditions and poverty, among many others. Added to this equation is the issue of their children, children who are now U.S. citizens and only know America as their home.

Mexican youths are a separate but equally important group as their ancestors. Not only are there differences between native and foreign-born children, but also the cultural differences that they face and how to adapt to this society are critical issues that require attention. I have decided to focus on Mexicans for this research because they are the largest immigrant group in this country. Although they are sometimes forgotten, there is a strong Mexican presence in Miami (Stepick, et al., 1999). Thus they will be key to the future of American civil society.

Theoretical perspective

I use two complementary theoretical perspectives related to identity formation: (1) *reactive ethnicity*, which argues that people will choose to hold onto their native culture or their parent's if they are met with adverse confrontation from the dominant culture (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001), and (2): *segmented assimilation theory*, which argues that immigrant minority will identify themselves by certain characteristics and conditions that will place them into a minority segment of American society (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001; Zhou, 1997).

Research Questions and Hypothesis

Youth often compare themselves to those around them. Their perceived social similarities or dissimilarities can influence how they perceive themselves. "Ethnic identification begins with the application of a label to oneself in a cognitive process of self-categorization, involving not only a claim to membership in a group or category but also in contrast of one's group or category with other groups or categories" (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001: 151).

There are three questions and three hypotheses that I will address:

- Question # 1: How do Mexican youths in Homestead, Florida identify themselves?
- Question # 2: What are the most important forces influencing ethnic identity?
- Question # 3: What role does religion play in the identity formation of these youths?
- Hypothesis # 1: The more Mexican youths identify themselves as "Mexican," the less likely they will be to consider participating in American society.

Hypothesis #2: The more prejudice and discrimination they are met with the less likely they will want to become “American.”

Hypothesis # 3: The more important religion is in their lives, the more civically engaged they will become in American society.

Methodology

This research was a component of a larger project, “Religion, and Civic Life in Miami” based at the Immigration and Ethnicity Institute at FIU and funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts. The project is a three-year study of six ethnic groups in Miami: West Indians, Cubans, Nicaraguans, Haitians, and Mexicans, with African-Americans as a control comparison. A major focus of this investigation is immigrant youth “because adolescence is a formative developmental stage of life, it is the time when individuals come into a self-awareness that defines how they see themselves fitting into the adult world of work, and family and social responsibility” (Stepick, et al., 1999: 6).

Miami was chosen as one of the gateway cities because of its strategic location. It is filled with diverse cultures from all over the world, particularly from Latin America and the Caribbean. Recent immigration to the United States has been from these countries; therefore it is only logical to study Miami’s communities as a predictor of what is to come in the next decades (Stepick, et al., 1999). Miami is known for its Cuban population, yet it has become the capital for all of Latin America. There are dozens of offices here that represent the largest firms based in Latin America and the Caribbean. Many banks even offer to open an account here and conduct business in Latin America. Television stations have also opted to move to Miami because of their home country’s political instability, media censorship, or simply because it is more convenient to work out of Miami. Miami is not only a location for business deals but political activism as

well. Most of Miami's political leaders are immigrants who have moved up the ranks to become the selected few that represent their immigrant communities.

I worked on the PEW project as a Research Assistant under the direction of Dr. Alex Stepick. I was assigned to work with the Mexican youths and observe and evaluate how religion influences this group in the Homestead area. My goal was to find three churches: a Catholic church, a freestanding Protestant church, and a storefront (a rented space usually found in strip malls) church where Mexicans were to be the majority of the congregation. After months of search, I found a Catholic mission church and a small Pentecostal church where the overwhelming congregation is Mexican. They later became the focus of my case studies. I traveled back and forth between Miami and Homestead two to three times a week for over ten months participating in church events, masses and services, and youth group meetings. I was welcomed almost immediately by the youths in both churches and able to integrate fully in the youth groups.

For the purposes of this research I carefully studied and observed numerous youth group meetings to fully understand the cause and effects these meetings had on the Mexican adolescents. After four months of participant observation, I began to have in-depth interviews with various immigrant youths. I define immigrant youth as those who are foreign-born or are second and third generation immigrant children.

I will be using terms such as: "Mexican," "American," "Mexican-American" and "civic engagement." I define "Mexican" in terms of nationality and identity. "Mexican" identity includes: wearing cowboy hats, boots and belts, eating typical Mexican food, listening to *ranchero*, *norteño*, or tex-mex music, and most importantly language-Spanish. I define "American" as the host culture, which can be seen everywhere:

television, schools, and daily life in the United States. It is something that cannot be isolated or avoided but can be rejected to a certain degree. “American” identity includes talking in English, dressing in jeans and t-shirts, eating pizza, hamburgers and fast food, listening to hip-hop, and pop music. The most widely used characteristic of being American is individualism, which will also be touched upon throughout this paper.

The hyphenated label “Mexican-American” is used to describe anyone who was born here and/or has adapted to American traditions with still holding onto their Mexicanness. It is a common label and increasingly the term of choice by many Mexican immigrant youths. It represents a combination of both native and host cultures. I will also be using the term “civic engagement.” I refer to this as any involvement with the greater community. The greater community can be the church community, which can be anything from participating in a church bake sale to recruiting voters for elections. I will use the term broadly so that it can encompass all areas of participation from these Mexican youths in their communities.

Design and Instrumentation

The primary technique utilized was qualitative research relying upon direct observation and associated field notes along with interviews conducted by myself. I have a primary sample of eleven Mexican youths between the ages of 17 and 25 years of age who are members of youth groups at the two churches where I participated as an active observer from September 2001 to July 2002. I specifically compared the youth in the Catholic mission church and the Protestant free standing church. I also attended church services and most youth activities that they held over a period of ten months. In addition, I interviewed twelve leaders and congregants from each church extensively.

Data analysis

As this is a qualitative research project, I will review the interviews and analyze the fieldwork to determine how the data fit into my hypotheses and associated operational definitions. As part of the conclusion of this research, I will offer suggestions as to how religious institutions can be a powerful tool of incorporation into American society for Mexican immigrant youths.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The role of religion among new immigrants has only recently been addressed. Nevertheless, numerous studies have documented the important role religions holds in the lives of many immigrants. In the rapidly emerging literature on immigration and religion, Warner (Warner, 1997; Warner, 1998a; Warner, 1998b; Warner and Wittner, 1998) and Ebaugh (Ebaugh and Chafetz, 2000a; Ebaugh and Chafetz, 2000b; Ebaugh and Chafetz, 2002; Ebaugh and Chafetz, 1999; Ebaugh and Curry, 2000; Ebaugh and O'Brien, and Chafetz 2000) have been among the most visible and influential. Their studies on immigrant communities and religion have proven to be beneficial to understanding how religion influences integration into American society.

Immigrant religion

Studies of immigrant religion have often discovered that religion has the power to bring together immigrants and make them feel closer to their homeland (DeMarinis and Grzymala-Moszczyńska, 1995). Al-Ahmary (2000) goes so far as to assert that immigrant religion is a means to nourish and support an immigrant's ethnic identity. Therefore religion can be a way to combat homesickness and the culture shock of recent arrival. For new immigrants, finding a support system is imperative to overcoming the trauma of the migration. More importantly, if they can find a congregation that welcomes them and that reinforces their ethnic identity, it can prove to be beneficial to their integration into the host society.

Thomas Tweed (1997) has focused on identification of Cuban exiles in Miami and how they interact at their church, Our Lady of Charity (La Ermita de la Caridad; La Ermita henceforth). Tweed argues that Cuban exiles were displaced when Castro took control of Cuba in 1959 and thus Cubans were left with no place to call home. La Ermita he suggests, provides that home that so many long for. The historical notion that the Virgin statue was smuggled out of Cuba and brought over clandestinely has made a deep and profound impact in the hearts of the exiled Cubans. Tweed states, “to be brought to the shrine as a child is to become Cuban; to be remembered there in the prayers from the sanctuary is to die Cuban” (Tweed, 1997: 119).

Tweed found that for Cuban exiles living in Miami, religion was their way of uniting as a group and finding their home after being displaced from their native country. He suggests La Ermita is a diasporic religious institution that ties together religion and nationalism, two key components of one’s individual and group identity. The church is known for its “Cubanness” throughout Miami and therefore has become a link between the past and the present and the migration from Cuba to the States. But more importantly it provides the setting for Cubans in Miami to express their cultural traditions in a religious atmosphere. In a comparative example Chou (1991) argues that the Korean Church in the United States actually helps its members maintain their Korean identity by celebrating Korean cultural traditions instead of celebrating religious traditions. In other words, the Korean church is more effective in maintaining national, rather than specifically religious, identities.

This is not extraordinary. Churches are generally known to create a warm and friendly space for their faithful in hopes of gathering a large congregation by making the

congregation feel at home. La Ermita carries this idea a step further with various events that replicate Cuban traditions while also embracing anti-Castro sentiments. This includes masses in honor of Cuban provinces, a broadcast of Saturday mass transmitted by Radio Marti to Cuba, and most notable of all, an annual celebration in the largest arenas in Miami honoring Cuba's patron saint, Our Lady of Charity.

Tweed has illustrated how a Catholic church provides an imagined community for Cubans who are displaced. The church serves as a second home, a reminder of what it is like to be among family and friends who share the nostalgia of back home. La Ermita celebrates their "Cubanness." For Cubans who long for their homeland to be free, La Ermita is a temporary consolation of support for their past and future struggles.

Ebaugh and Chafetz (2000) have edited an ethnographic book, Religion and the New Immigrants, which covers thirteen religious institutions in Houston, Texas. The volume emerged from the RENIR project (Religion, Ethnicity, and New Immigrant Research), whose purpose was "to learn more about the religious communities formed or joined by new immigrants" (Ebaugh and Chafetz, 2000: 15). The RENIR project set out to study various new immigrant congregations and Mexican congregations.

In Religion and the New Immigrants, each case study addresses thematic issues that bridge all the ethnographic data gathered. In short, the book argues that religious institutions do indeed influence new immigrant's lives and their adjustments to life in the United States. In most cases religious institutions have eased the way for the new immigrants by offering ESL (English as a Second Language) or citizenship classes. One important finding of this study was the question regarding the reproduction of ethnicity. For example if a Catholic Church is predominately Mexican, do they celebrate Mexican

traditions, such as the 12th of December, dedicated to the Virgin of Guadalupe, or posadas (Christmas holiday festivals)? The fact that these churches are predominately formed by one ethnic group, Mexicans, leads Ebaugh and Chafetz to ask, does the church then become a “niche church”? A niche church is known to serve a particular group of people, an ethnic church. While one church may not want to become known as a Mexican church, another may embrace it.

Ebaugh et al. have found that all their case studies have embraced the nationalities of their immigrant congregants, because they are aware of its importance in helping the members feel at ease. Ethnic identity is a means of bringing together a group and as such can include the second generation. The youth are the focus of this research by Ebaugh et al., because they are seen as tomorrow’s leaders. How then, the researchers ask, do we accommodate them? Ebaugh et al. conclude that in most of the congregations they studied, the youth were not active in church. This creates a problem for the church’s leaders. She suggests bringing in the youth into church activities and providing a comfortable setting for them may help. In other words, merely having a youth group is not enough. Yet, because the youth are a major factor of the church’s existence, they need to be included in immigration religion research.

Ethnic Identity

The overwhelming consensus is that immigrant congregations maintain and reinforce ethnic identities (Stepick, 2002). But what is ethnic identity and why are we so concerned with it?

What is Ethnic Identity?

In the book Ethnic Identity, Anya Royce (1982) offers numerous definitions. She divides them into five categories: objective, subjective, composite, contemporary and style definitions. Objective definitions refer to those that are based on traits or combination of traits. Fred Barth is an example of a scholar who works with an objective definition of ethnic identity. Barth (see Alvarez and Fernandez, 2000) argues that ethnic groups are defined by their contents, which creates boundaries. The boundary approach, which he coined, states that identity is how we perceive ourselves in society and why we built boundaries around those characteristics. Thus creating a list of characteristics of who we are and those who do not have these characteristics defines one's ethnicity.

Subjective definitions take the opposite approach. Isajiw (see Royce, 1982) argues that ethnicity is a process where one identifies oneself as being different from others or belonging to a different group or is identified as different by others, or both identifies themselves and are identified as different by others (Royce, 1982).

Composite definitions are a combination of both of the objective and subjective explanations. Gordon and Shibutani (see Royce, 1982) argue that ethnic groups are people who believe that they are part of a group that is constructed by race, religion, similar physical features or emotional ties, with the exception that they strive to preserve their ethnicity and all believe that they share from common ancestors.

The Social Science Research Council in 1973 (see Royce, 1982) came together at a symposium to agree on an official definition of ethnic identity. They decided on a definition that emphasizes six points:

1. A past-oriented group identification emphasizing common origins.
2. Some conception of cultural and social distinctiveness from other groups.
3. Relationship of the ethnic group to a component unit in a broader system of social relations.
4. The fact that ethnic groups are larger than kin or locality groups and transcend face-to-face interaction.
5. Different meanings for ethnic categories both in different social settings and for different individuals.
6. The assumption that ethnic categories are emblematic, having names with meaning for members and for analysts.

Royce's own definition is that ethnic identity is the "the sum of all feelings on the part of group members about those values, symbols, and common histories that identify them as an ethnic group" (Royce, 1982: 18). She refers to ethnicity as a "style;" we can change our style whenever we choose, although we may never do. She argues for a style definition because only then can we explain second and third generation children who are born in the United States yet consider themselves part of their parent's ethnic group.

Alejandro Portes, known for his work on immigration theory and the Cuban enclave, argues that ethnic identity is a way of asking ourselves where are we from. Portes and Rumbaut state that even though ethnic identity is a social and political construction they are usually felt as natural. They are natural because we often link our ethnic identity to our family, our homeland therefore it is what he calls a "birth connection" (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001: 161). It is our parent's culture, language, blood, or family ties that we think about when asked about our identity. For example, in a society like the United States where there are hundreds of ethnicities and ethnic groups,

the children of these groups are also perceived to belong to the same group although they might have been born here.

Society makes us believe that identity formation is a “linear process that is based on your socioeconomic status and your degree of acculturation” (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001: 149) but in reality there are numerous other factors that come together to produce one’s ethnic identity. Portes et al. outline several variables that are at the forefront of influencing ethnic identity: parental status, family structure, acculturation, and outlook for ethnic identities. According to a longitudinal study that was conducted on second-generation children they found that there is a strong connection between these variables and how they identify themselves.

Immigrant Youth & Theoretical Perspectives

Added to this equation are now new and redefined identities that include a couple or several ethnicities. Portes suggests that immigrant youths have four options in self-identification: (1) retaining native culture and identity, (2) adopting a hyphenated identity label, (3) assimilating into American culture, or (4) adopting a pan-ethnic identity. This choice is a personal one that is influenced by an array of social, economical, and political factors. Primarily, how one identifies him or herself will heavily depend on American society’s reaction toward the immigrant youth.

Portes and his associates have also found that the way youth identify themselves heavily relies on various factors: race, native culture, family setting, socioeconomic status, language, and education, among others. Self-identification for second-generation children is complex; “they must define themselves in relation to multiple reference

groups and classification into which they are placed by their native peers, schools, ethnic community, and the larger society" (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001: 150).

For the purpose of this research I have chosen two theoretical concepts to answer these questions. Segmented assimilation and reactive ethnicity are both theories that base their argument on how the individual is categorized when they arrive in this country and how the individuals themselves choose to identify themselves.

Segmented assimilation is a term to "understand the process by which the new second generation becomes incorporated into the system of stratification in the host society and the different outcomes of this process" (Zhou, 1997). According to Portes segmented assimilation depends on four variables: (1) if an immigrant is first or second generation; (2) the pace of acculturation among parents and children and its bearing on normative integration; (3) the barriers, cultural and economic, confronted by second generation youth in their quest for successful adaptation and; (4) the family and community resources for confronting these barriers (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). Added to this is how the individual is received in the host society. Are they accepted? How the individual looks, their physical features, age, skills, socioeconomic status, English skills and their family situations, all are factors affect an individual's reception by the host society.

These factors will determine how the individual adjusts and identifies in the United States. Second-generation youths of today are faced with a pluralistic and fragmented society that offers both opportunities and pitfalls to assimilation. "The question is not if they will assimilate but to what segment of society will they assimilate to" (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001: 55). The segment of identification is one out of the four

options as defined earlier. The individual will choose one that is closest to how they are perceived by outsiders and themselves.

Reactive ethnicity theory also focuses on the same characteristics to determine how a person will identify him/herself. As the term implies, reactive ethnicity is when the individual *reacts* to the host society to define who they perceive themselves to be. Portes et al. argue that a person might do this when they are threatened, persecuted, or discriminated against. Instead of identifying with the host culture, the individual gravitates more toward their native culture as a reaction against the hostility shown to them by the host culture.

Reactive ethnicity in a sense is a type of segmented assimilation. It is the native ethnic identity that the individual will hold on to in reaction towards negative reinforcement. Hence because of a negative reception, the person will retreat to adhere to their ethnic group even more strongly than they would have if the host society had accepted them. “Reactive ethnicity is the result of confrontation with an adverse native mainstream and the rise of defensive identities and solidarities to counter it” (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001: 284).

For example, a young Haitian girl in Miami may identify herself as West Indian because they are more socially accepted. She clearly rejects the idea of calling herself African-American because of the connotations that come along with it. Yet, she will use West Indian identity because she can maximize her interests more so than if she use her Haitian identity. There is also the case of a Korean girl teased by her classmates. They call her “Twinkie” (yellow on the inside and white on the inside) because she grew up in a white neighborhood. Yet her family constantly reminds her she is Korean and must

marry likewise. “Youths see and compare themselves with those around them, based with the reference groups that most directly affect their experiences-especially with regard to socially visible and categorized markers as genders, phenotype, language, and nationality” (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001: 151).

For many immigrants who fall under the “minority” category once in the United States, religious institutions can also help immigrants define their identities, and to combat prejudice and discrimination they face in society as well (Stepick and Stepick, 2002).

Why do we need ethnic identity?

There are dozens of theories on ethnic identity but essentially there are three reasons why we need and invoke ethnic identity. First, many scholars such as Van den Berghe (see James, 2001) believe that primordialism is what leads us to create such categories. Primordialists state that all human beings have an innate need to belong and/or establish a special bond with people of their own group (Alvarez and Fernandez, 2000). Salter (see James, 2001) argues that having a common descent is the core element of an ethnicity. It is this common denominator that brings the “same” people together. Primordialists argue that “peoples’ ethnic and religious identities have deep social, historical, and genetic foundations, and that the motivation for ethnic and kinship affiliation come from these subjective, psychological forces internal to the individual and related to basic human needs for security and, more importantly, survival” (James, 2001: 54).

A second explanation is that ethnic identity can be situational. Circumstantialists agree that an external situation or context can trigger a need for ethnic identity (Alvarez

and Fernandez, 2000). Depending on the external environment ethnic identity can increase or decrease (James, 2001). Situational ethnicity can be characterized by “differing criteria for ascription of ethnic identities, the fluidity of ethnic boundaries, and the varying relevance of ethnic and other social identities” (James, 2001: 54). For example Okamura (see James, 2001) explains that “during the apartheid in South Africa ethnic identity was the major determinant of ethnic relations *because* it was imposed externally” (see James, 2001: 54). This, it can be argued, occurs with segmented assimilation, because the individual has to adapt to external definitions of a particular race and so assumes a more suitable ethnic identity where they can maximize their interests.

Thirdly, ethnic identity can be used for an instrumental need. This is also an external factor, which reinforces ethnic identity when the situation arises. Identity is a psychological process that as human beings we all experience yet it may never be challenged or questioned unless the time or situation presents itself. Instrumentalists argue that “if ethnic groups are alliances, and if alliances are the instruments of individuals pursuing their interests, we would also expect ethnicity to be situational” (James, 2001: 30). Instrumentalists differ from circumstantialists in that they believe that “ethnicity is chosen as a strategy to defend or seize resources” (James, 2001: 53). For minority immigrant youth, instrumental ethnicity through various Latino organizations such as the National Council of La Raza (NCLR) or ASPIRA can be a way of attaining power and respect in an otherwise hostile environment.

Civic Engagement

Ethnic identity can be a vehicle for immigrant youths to become part of American society. Bankston and Zhou (1995) discovered that Vietnamese youth who have strong ties to religious groups are more likely to be close to their ethnic community and even do better in school (Bankston and Zhou, 1995).

Little research has been done to determine immigrant youth's civic engagement. How they participate in civic duties is a key factor in assimilation and integration issues, yet it has not been widely examined. The few studies done are mostly based on voting participation in the electoral process but beyond that we don't really know how immigrant youth engage civically. Bedolla (2000) studied how the youth in California supported the protest of Proposition 187, which proposed to end public services and education to undocumented immigrants. However, Bedolla did not provide immigration statuses of those interviewed. So we do not know who is U.S. born or a recent arrival.

As Bedolla (2000) discovered, immigrant ethnic youth when asked, if they were interested in mainstream ("American") politics, they said no because it they felt it was about them [Americans] trying to hurt us [immigrant youth] (Stepick, 2002). I argue that this is so because of the negative reaction to their arrival, which in turn creates a downward spiral in terms of civic engagement. Stepick (2002) argues "ethnic identity is a key intermediary in affecting civic engagement. Adult immigrants whom the host society defines as different and subjects to discrimination are likely to have their civic engagement become some form of ethnic politics" (Stepick, 2002: 2).

Other studies have shown that U.S. public schools do in fact encourage civic engagement on behalf of their students by promoting extracurricular activities (Stepick,

2002) such as clubs and sports. Schools in Miami-Dade County have, in fact, imposed a community service requirement for high school graduation (Stepick, 2002). Many religious institutions as well may encourage civic engagement through youth groups and community service oriented activities. “Church involvement therefore, may encourage civic engagement” (Stepick, 2002: 8).

Hence I suspect that immigrant religion and ethnic identification are both factors that can promote or impede civic engagement. It is a multi-linear process in which each variable affects the other to result in various levels of civic engagement. In my research of Mexican youths I expect that the religious institutions will provide a safe house for ethnic identity, which in turn will promote civic engagement into host society.

As Tweed and Ebaugh have both shown, churches are a way for immigrants to feel at home and combat the prejudice and discrimination they may feel from the outside. Religious institutions can be a stepping-stone for immigrants to learn the American way of living (e.g. by providing ESL and citizenship classes) and bringing together the congregation to each other and a sense of their homeland. Ethnic identity is what Portes et al. suggests is based on background characteristics such as parent’s culture, education and socioeconomic status. All of which can determine your classification in American society by segmented assimilation. Relying on the fact that immigrant youth will fall into a category depends on their instrumental need.

The question then becomes when an individual chooses their ethnic identity how will it influence their civic engagement in the host society? I suggest that the manner in which ethnic identity is chosen will determine how involved he or she will be in civil society.

CHAPTER III

THE SETTING

Homestead, Florida

I began my research in the relatively isolated community of Homestead, Florida, located 20 miles south of Miami. Homestead is a rural city full of beautiful country homes and busy streets. It is a perfect combination of both worlds and a wonderful escape from urban Miami. Homestead by many is referred to as South Dade, the southeastern tip of Florida leading up to the Keys. Yet politically the city of Homestead is much smaller than that. On a map it resembles an “L”. The huge area west and north of Homestead are unincorporated Metro Dade, further north is Leisure City and Naranja. Yet the entire area is commonly referred to as Homestead.

Homestead is home to various ethnic groups, including the largest Mexican community in south Florida. As Table 1 below illustrates, in the city of Homestead, Hispanics are the majority at 51.8%, followed by Anglos (or more technically non-Hispanic Whites) with 22.9% and Blacks/African-Americans at 21.6%. Almost half of the Hispanic group is Mexican. This area receives largely Mexicans because of the employment opportunities. Homestead is the agricultural center of South Florida. In the Homestead CCD region, which refers to areas north of Homestead including Leisure City and Princeton, are also home to many Mexicans. Leisure city has less agricultural opportunities, but hosts numerous nurseries and has the second largest concentration of Mexicans.

**Table 1. Geographic area: City of Homestead, Homestead CCD,
and Miami-Dade County**

Group	City of Homestead Percentages	Homestead CCD¹ Percentages	Miami-Dade County Percentages
Anglo	22.9%	24.8%	20.7%
Black or African-American	21.6%	22.5%	19.0%
Hispanic-Mexican	51.8%- 22.8%	49.4%- 19.6%	57.3%- 1.7%
Total number of population	31,909	70,770	2,253,362

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000.²

Mexicans in Homestead

The Mexicans whom I interviewed claimed that Mexican migration to Homestead began in the 1960s. Much like the traditional destinations for Mexicans, Florida's agricultural industry is a magnet for hardworking people who want to better their living situations. In Homestead, there are vast lands that produce everything from tomatoes to lemons. I heard from several informants that their ancestors came to Homestead through word of mouth. Landowners spread the word that they were looking for workers and it floated back to Mexican states largely rural like Michoacán, Guanajuato and others. Employers preferred immigrant workers because they were cheap and did not have to worry about unions or providing benefits (Dunignan and Gann, 1998). Throughout the nation there was a decline in Anglo and Black Americans wanting these jobs and the cheap labor from immigrants was an attractive alternative (Dunignan and Gann, 1998).

¹ Homestead CCD refers to Homestead Center County Division, Census 2000. This area includes the city of Homestead and roughly the northern areas of Leisure City and Princeton.

² Please note these percentages are rough estimates based on my calculations of subtracting Hispanics, Blacks, and others from the total population.

Many of the Mexicans who came to Homestead were migrant workers who were used to traveling through states for fieldwork. Some came from Texas; at least half of the kids I talked to are originally from Texas. One young girl's entire family came from Texas following the migrant trail. They arrived in Homestead as one of the first families in the 1960s. Others came directly from Mexico. Most of these families are or were when they arrived undocumented immigrants.

Much like other migrant states, Florida's migrant workers are poor. From my participant observation many of the Mexicans come to church in their traditional Mexican style clothes (cowboy hats, boots and belts), *charro* clothing, or t-shirts and jeans. In the Catholic mission church some of the people appear to be barely surviving. There I saw men with stained worn shirts, pants that no longer need pressing because the crease had already become engraved and other modest clothing. But the clearest indicators are their hands. Men are likely to have rough and callused hands that show years of hard work. The women show it in their faces, with sun burned skin that ages rapidly and sad tired eyes. I once saw a woman at a church pushing a wheelchair with her disabled son. Her face was tired, her eyes drained, and her body moved very slowly.

According to my research, their family situations are also an added burden to their lives. The three primary problems Mexicans families face in Homestead are: alcoholism, domestic abuse and gangs/drugs in schools. Countless times, kids told me without any reservation or hesitance that their father is an alcoholic. I heard about the alcoholism problems not only from the kids themselves but also from police officers who were often called to the homes because of domestic abuse issues resulting from a drunken spouse. On the three drive-alongs I did with the police, they all claimed that the number one issue

Mexican people in Homestead were facing was domestic abuse. The policemen with whom I rode all believe that many Mexican women won't call the police because they are used to the domestic violence and/or it's traditional. The victims also are often undocumented and afraid to call the police. The cops try to talk to these women and inform them that domestic abuse is not permissible in the United States. But according to the police, however, their information has had little effect.

One officer recounted that while out patrolling one night he came across a drunken Mexican man on the street. The man was barely able to stand up from his drunkenness and his slurred speech was hard to understand. The cop advised him to drink at home, that way he would be safe and wouldn't have to spend a lot of money at the bars. The man rejected the idea because he says that his wife gets on his nerves and he would not be able to drink in peace. Early on a Sunday morning, on my way to a church participant observation, I saw two very drunk men holding each other up crossing the street. It was no later than eight thirty in the morning. Obviously they had been out all night.³

According to the police, the schools in Homestead are another problem. They are plagued with gangs, drug, and teen pregnancies. One officer told me that he is often called to the Florida City Elementary because the kids beat up their teachers. I don't know if the officer was telling the truth, but the youths I worked with agree that they are often offered drugs and pressured to join gangs.

³ William Taylor (1979) suggests that Mexican men are socialized to drink from a young age, and that this has been so ever since pre-Hispanic times. He argues that consumption of pulque (an alcoholic drink made from the maguey plant) has been around before the Spaniards ever set foot in Mexico and was seen as an "essential medication" (Taylor, 1979: 38). It was used for various medicinal abilities. Therefore Taylor believes alcohol became a traditional part of Mexican culture.

Churches

I began going to Homestead in September of 2001 and continued until mid-July 2002. My goal was to locate three churches whose congregations were at least half Mexican: a Catholic church, a freestanding Protestant church and a storefront Protestant church. Unfortunately I couldn't find a storefront Protestant church because the majority of Mexicans in this area are Catholic, but I was able to find a small Mexican Pentecostal church. Among the three Catholic churches in Homestead, I decided to work at St. Ann's Mission, which is known for its work with Mexican migrant workers. Both the Catholic and Pentecostal churches service poor, working class nursery and farm workers. Within both congregations there is a feeling of community and of having a second home. Because both congregations are overwhelmingly Mexican, there is a sense that they are a "Mexican" church.

St. Ann's Mission Catholic Church

St. Ann's is located in Naranja, a few miles north of Homestead. All of the masses are held in Spanish and it is the only Catholic mission church in South Dade that serves the migrant worker community. Ironically, while the congregation is exclusively Hispanic and almost entirely Mexican, the neighborhood surrounding the church is African-American. I have never seen a Black family attend services, although I was told by a congregant that some come when the church offers food and clothing once every week.

The church itself resembles an old white house with a front lawn and back yard. The entire church grounds including the priest's residence sit on more or less an acre of land. Surrounding the church are residential homes. A metal chain-link fence, which I

estimate reaches seven feet high surrounds the church. There are three buildings on the grounds: the church, a multi-purpose hall and the rectory. The church itself is one-story, 200 by 100 feet.⁴ It has a flat roof with a statute of the Virgin Mary the size of a toddler. She holds a baby Jesus in her arms and is clothed with a cape. The Virgin, like the exterior of the church, is a plain concrete gray color. Beneath the Virgin on the wall above the entrance, is a concrete square plate, which reads “Misión Santa Ana.”

The inside of the church is reminiscent of a one-room home with wooden pews, but no benches for kneeling. There are three wall-height windows on each side, covered with white Venetian blinds. The church has no air conditioning. Instead there are six ceiling fans, which are always running at top speed. But when the church is full, the interior remains hot and humid. The altar is a simple wooden table covered with a *zarape* (a Mexican green, red, yellow, and white colored cloth), which is changed during the different Catholic cycles, e.g., Easter, and Christmas. It sometimes has a Mexican flag on it draped along the table as a runner. Alongside the altar in the corners of the church are potted palms, two feet high, which are also changed during the seasons. During the Christmas season they use poinsettias and other brightly colored flowers. There is a life-size cross behind the altar hanging on the wall. The church is simple. There are no fancy marble tables or stained glass windows, usually found in Catholic churches. To the left of the altar is a life size statute of Joseph with his staff and another statute of the Virgin with baby Jesus sitting on a rock.

There are various Mexican symbols in the church: the Virgin of Guadalupe, the Mexican flag, and the choir songs are sung in *corrido* and *ranchero* styles. Although the

⁴All dimensions are estimates.

priest is Cuban, Padre Pedro, (Father Pedro Garcia is translated into Padre Pedro Garcia) as he is warmly called, has adapted to the Mexican community and encourages their traditions. He embraces Mexican festivals like Virgin of Guadalupe where Mexicans traditionally fast and walk to the church in a procession, and the “*Rosca de Reyes*” where in Mexico they traditionally have a feast in which all neighbors and family participate to honor Three Kings day.

Behind the church there is a small grass covered space between the church and the meeting hall. It has a bench where you can sit and admire the shrine of the Virgin of Guadalupe, Mexico’s patron saint. You can always find white and red carnations by her feet with notes of prayers and petitions. Off to the right is the rectory where the priest resides. There are two parking spots in front and two entrances, one to the inside of the lawn and the other facing the street. In the front to the right is an open lot of grass where cars park or is used to serve mass on special occasions like Virgin of Guadalupe day when the number of people triples. The grassy area can hold up to three hundred metal chairs.

On the corner of the block by the fence is a sign that reads “Misión Santa Ana.” As you approach the entrance there is a grill off to the left hand corner where on Sundays you can be greeted with the delicious smell of barbeque. By the BBQ grills are two plastic picnic tables and several chairs. The youth group sometimes uses them for food sales, for extra income. When the youth are not using it, other groups such the men’s and women’s or the marriage group sells food. They all sell typical Mexican foods such as *carne asada*, tamales, and tortillas. Every Sunday, one of these groups sells food.

Mass is always full. There are twenty-four pews with a capacity to sit, maybe ten people in each, although that usually is not enough. The majority are families and their children. I estimated at least 250 people attend one mass. There are always people standing around the back and sides of the church. I estimate 30% of the congregants are senior citizens. I can tell that the people here are working and lower working class. They are dressed in casual clothing and some have well-worn clothes. One man, for example, had on a blue shirt that was a little dirty. I looked down to his hands and saw that they were calloused, dry and his nails were dirty. I noticed that there were many pick-ups parked with farm equipment in the back.

There are many young families who adopt the northern Mexican style of dress. I saw a little boy who probably was two or three years old dressed up in a cowboy hat and boots. But not everyone dresses or looks alike. Some appeared to be of indigenous descent with darker, copper skin and hooked noses. On one occasion a couple that sat in front of me looked thoroughly indigenous. The wife was of a beautiful olive complexion, high cheekbones, full lips, and long black braids. Her husband was darker with short straight hair and Indian facial features. An older woman maybe in her 70's had beautiful long silver braids and Indian features. Another group consisted of five young teenage girls dressed in *charro* or cowboy style. They had long black skirts with matching vests and silver coins all the way down the side of the outfit. I noticed several handicapped children with their moms. They were all in wheelchairs and appeared to have some form of mental retardation.

Mass at Misión Santa Ana follows a traditional Catholic structure. There are no references to Mexico except for the announcements at the end when they sometimes

mention a certain event such as la Virgen de Guadalupe or a festival with a Mexican band and food. Padre Pedro constantly preaches about helping one another as God's will and joining one another to honor God. Although, the congregation doesn't seem to be too active in the mass, the nuns try to change that. The church has three nuns from the Guadalupan order in Mexico who have come to St. Ann's to help serve the migrant community. They are mostly in charge of servicing the chapels that St. Ann's has in each migrant labor camp throughout Homestead. At the main church they lead the congregation in song rehearsal and how to answer during mass when there is a call and response. They always arrive half an hour before mass on Sundays and they take that time to rehearse the mass with the congregation.

Padre Pedro, as I mentioned earlier, is a Cuban who has become an honorary Mexican in the hearts of the St. Ann congregation. He is a man in his 60s who left his native Cuba in the early 1960s for Spain, soon after Castro took office. He has worked with the poor in Spain and Canada and now resides in Homestead. He came to St. Ann's in 1995 after the earlier priest left. He arrived at a time when the congregation was in need of a loving and understanding priest. Some congregants told me that the earlier priest was not approachable. Initially not familiar with the Mexican community, Padre Pedro quickly became attached to Homestead's migrant Mexican population and they to him. All the congregants whom I spoke to praise him and no one wants him to ever leave. It is this affection that has led to overcrowded masses and people willing to travel miles to come to St. Ann's instead of their own local Catholic churches.

Iglesia Mexicana Pentecostal⁵

IMP is a small Mexican Pentecostal church inside the Redland migrant labor camp, which is located in the heart of Homestead. The Redland camp offers low cost housing to dozens of migrant families. There are around forty homes in the camp where you can reside if you are a migrant or nursery worker. The concrete homes are small and run down. The homes rarely have more than two bedrooms and are a dull concrete color with a living room, bathroom and a kitchen. The walls are in need of paint and the surrounding area of grass is patchy and full of weeds. The homes are roughly 100 by 50 feet. In front of each home is a small 20 by 20 feet patch of grass where the cars park. Most homes in the camp are surrounded with clotheslines and freshly washed clothes. As cars drive by, Mexican *ranchero* music blasts out, as it does from many of the homes. It seems as if everyone here is Mexican, although there are reportedly one or two Central American families living here, as well.

The church is a one-room trailer, approximately 100 feet long and 50 feet wide. It is cemented down on cinder blocks and tied to steel bolts sunk inside the ground, a preventative measure taken after Hurricane Andrew wiped out most of Homestead. The church trailer even has shutters on every window and air conditioning, which few homes have in this area. On the outside right hand corner there is a hand written sign about two feet wide and one foot high illustrating the church's name and its service schedule.

The church's inside physical layout is decorated with a green and white theme. The curtains are green and are held by white tiebacks, while the two doors and four windows are draped with green curtains and plastic white flowers on their frames. The

⁵ Pseudonym-The church along with the Pastor's name has been changed at the Pastor's request.

church is also trimmed with plastic flowers alongside the walls. The flowers and curtains make the church seem like a cozy living room and less like a place of worship. The altar is small, a mere 10 by 10 foot space. There is no cross or Biblical literature around. There is just a plain wooden podium on the floor and another on the stage. The podium on the floor is used for readings and the one on the altar is for preaching by the pastor or individuals who “testify.” The altar counter (it resembles more of a counter than an actual table) is covered with a green cloth and white and red plastic roses. There are two three-dimensional white dove figurines symbolizing peace attached to the cloth.

Since there is limited space there are no pews; instead there are metal folding chairs with plastic cushions, set up in two aisles with four seats in each row and five rows in total. There are no benches for kneeling, instead people kneel on the floor facing the back of the church. Unlike in the Catholic tradition where parishioners face the altar when praying, here it is the opposite. There is no hands clasped or heads up, instead the individuals bow their heads into the chair and pray silently.⁶

The church has several services during the week, but the most attended is on Sunday. Sunday mornings are for Bible study and a brief sermon, Sunday nights have the traditional service. The congregation is small, maybe 20 people at its peak. Everyone who attends the church lives in the Redland labor camp or within five miles. The pastor informed me that his congregation are faithful followers from when he was still living in the camp and now that some have moved, including himself, they still come. The congregation consists of: about six to eight older Mexican women over the age of fifty,

⁶ Incidentally, people kneeled facing the back in the other Pentecostal churches in the area that I observed in the Homestead area.

two to four youths from 15-18 years old, and three to five middle-aged adults with the remaining people being small children between the ages of infants to young teenagers (15 years old).

As with St. Ann's, some are migrant workers, although most people here are blue-collar workers who work in construction or as mechanics. There are few individuals at IMP who dress in modern day clothes; rather, they dress conservatively. The women are always dressed in skirts or dresses. They never wear pants. The men wear slacks and dress shirts and the children are all well dressed in little boy Dockers and black rubber sole shoes, while the girls wear frilled dresses with lots of lace and ribbons in their hair.

The first ten minutes of every service is used for greeting each other as they come in. On every occasion I was there, as soon as someone enters, he or she is greeted with a warm smile and a hug. The women are more affectionate; they give you a tighter more intimate hug while men usually just shake your hand. From time to time there are some men who hug women with whom they are friends. Every greeting is followed by a "Dios te bendiga, hermana o hermano" ("May God bless you brother or sister"). It provides an amiable atmosphere where you feel like your part of a family. The physical environment reinforces that feeling. Because it is usually the same crowd and rarely are there new faces, the congregation has become friends outside the church. I have overheard often, invitations for dinners outside the church and family gatherings where they invite other church members to their homes.

The services are in Spanish, although English is sometimes spoken during the service. Once they are ready to begin and everyone has taken his or her seat, the pastor's wife goes to the podium on the floor and welcomes everyone present. She gives a Bible

verse's location and everyone quickly finds it. Everyone has a bible and if you don't have one, they will offer you theirs. She reads and is affirmed by shouts of "Amen" and "Glory to God" from the audience. After the passage she takes a seat and a layman who is the father of one of the biggest family in the congregation begins to play a song where he plays guitar and sings while his 13 year-old daughter plays the drums. The congregation joins in and some clap their hands and two women play the tambourines.

After the music, the pastor comes up to the altar and begins by welcoming and blessing everyone present. If there is a new face he will ask you to identify yourself as he did to me when I first arrived. He reads several passages from the Bible and explains them to the congregants. Some common themes include critiques of materialism or of not prioritizing values and morals. He chooses passages that illustrate these ideas and interprets the verses in layman's terms so that everyone fully understands the message of the passage. After the readings there is a music section where several songs performed. The songs are all lively and danceable. People sing along while they sway and clap. Most songs are in a Mexican *corrido* style with a fast beat and *mariachi* sounding vocals. The songs are all in reference to God and the Devil and the struggle between them. By the end of the song, God is always the victor.

What follows is called "testifying," which forms the main part of the service. Individuals go up to the podium and testify to the Lord about what He has done for them. At least three or four individuals always go up. The most heartwarming case of the times I visited the congregation was a man whose father-in-law has cancer and had been sent home to die. The man and his wife were suffering tremendously and prayed every night for the older man's betterment. After a week he went to the hospital for a check up and

the doctors reported that they could not find any sign of cancer in his body. The couple was so relieved and thankful that the man had to “testify” today about this miracle.

Most of the people who went up had similar stories or were testifying about losing a bad habit. A woman testified that God helped her get rid of her smoking habit, which was already taking a toll on her health. Another was thankful that she found the Lord because she was mixed up with the “wrong” people who were influencing her to take drugs and party while she had a family at home. Since her “awakening” as she refers to it she has now left all that behind and takes care of her children.

After individuals testify, the pastor indicates that it is time to read from the Bible again. People from the audience pick out a random passage and read out loud. There are no specific correlations in themes but they do sometimes emphasize that we should help one another. The pastor’s wife does several readings and Norma, the children’s biblical teacher, reads as well. I was surprised to see an eight-year-old boy recite a verse by memory. There is a brief intercession of hymns before we go onto the pastor’s sermon. The congregation sings the hymns a cappella with their eyes closed and moving their bodies and arms softly.

The pastor gives his sermon, which is always focused around evangelization. I observed how the congregants focus their attention on his every word. His discourse concentrates on the need to evangelize and the importance of coming to church and participating, which is the only way out of trouble and into the kingdom of Heaven. Everyone seems to be involved and enthusiastic about the sermons judging by their body language. Their eyes are fixed, attentive and bodies are almost not moving, while they yell out “Amen” and “Hallelujah” in affirmation of the pastor’s statements.

The pastor manages to capture the audience by preaching and the same time giving a lecture on various subjects like how the U.S. gets involved in world affairs by helping others but in reality it is because they want something in return. I found this comment interesting because everyone yelled a firm, "Yeah!" The fact that he even mentioned it, shows their concern for our government policies and its consequences. However, he blames homelessness on the irresponsibility of the individual and not of any higher power or social forces. Criminals are not excluded, he believes that the reason that people get into trouble is because they follow the wrong path, not that God punishes them but instead it is oneself. Once the sermon is over he closes the service with a blessing and goes to everyone giving them a hug and/or kiss on the cheek. At the end of the service everyone follows the welcome greetings from before where he or she give each other a handshake or hug and blessing.

CHAPTER IV

OBSERVATIONS

Youth Group Structures

The youth group at St. Anne's meets every Wednesday night in the multi-purpose hall on the church grounds. They meet at eight o'clock and the meeting usually lasts for two hours, although at times they have stayed on for closer to three. I usually arrived around seven forty-five so I could chat with some of the kids beforehand. When I got there the first time I had just made it by eight o'clock, thinking I was late I rushed up to the group of people and found out that most of the people were not there yet. I introduced myself to three people who were there, two guys and one girl. I asked for the person in charge to tell him or her about my being there. One of the guys Carlos said that they were not in yet and began asking what was I doing for this project. I gave them all my "little speech" and they nodded their heads. I began talking to the girl, Vilma. I felt more comfortable with her I guess because she was another female. I asked how many people were in the group, how long does it meet and who was the leader. She was very nice and answered all my questions. I began talking to her about normal stuff, name, age, and nationality. She said everyone at the group is Mexican except herself.

We stood outside for 10 minutes and it was getting chilly. They were all prepared with jackets or sweaters. Unfortunately I was not and spent the rest of the night shivering. More people started to show up and I met another guy by the name of Rafael, who appears to be the oldest in the group. Vilma told me that he is her partner at leading another youth group in the camps. We decided to go in. The chairs were prearranged

into a circle for a close intimate feeling. I asked Vilma if I should sit outside the circle and just listen. She said I should sit next to her and be part of the group, which I did. I am glad I did because what was to come next was very exciting. By now more and more people started coming in. There were at last 20 people there. There were around seven young men, which impressed me, as I did not expect to see many young men at a youth group.

As we sat around waiting for the leader, we were all talking to each other. Vilma and I hit it off as I told her why I was there and what interested me. We made small talk and waited for the meeting to begin. The leader finally showed up around 8:30 and I presented myself and told him why I was there. He greeted me and was pleased that I was there. His name is Victor but he goes by “*el grillo*,” which means cricket in Spanish. He began by saying that some of us were new so we should have a game to break the ice and relieve stress.

This game is called *el cartero* (postman) and the goal of it is to find a seat after the *cartero* says he has something for you. Whoever is left without a seat has to be the next *cartero*. He started it off: “*Vinó el cartero y trajo cartas para los que tienen ojos*” (“The postman came and brought mail for anyone who has a pair of eyes”), everyone ran about and found seats. Whoever was out three times would have to lead. It was like musical chairs, most of us had to be the *cartero*, including myself twice. It definitely served as an icebreaker as I found myself completely integrated in the group within 30 minutes. What was really funny was during the game they would say something like “*Vinó el cartero y trajo cartas para los que tienen chones*”. I was completely clueless; I never heard the word “*chones*” before. I later found out that it meant underwear. There

were several words unfamiliar to me, even though Spanish is my native language. They had different slang words for socks, watches and even shirts. I figured by the time I am done with this study, I would be proficient in Mexican slang. Every other word was “*chido*,” “*órale*” and “*mi brother*” (which means cool, hey and my brother, respectively).

The game ended when *el grillo* was out three times and he had to lead. The topic for today was “Nos damos a conocer” (“Lets get to know one another”). However, before we begin the meeting we stood up and said a prayer, and we all made the sign of the cross. It was a simple prayer thanking God that we were all present and asking him to help us lead our lives as good Christians. El grillo began the topic with writing a phrase on the board and quoting the Bible. “How we should get to know one another and that we should look to God to help us, that life is more than just acquaintances and we need to have true meaningful relationships with one another.” For this purpose, he paired us of with people whom we didn’t know too well and asked us to sit in a corner and talk.

El grillo then gave us a series of questions to ask one another to find out more about that person. Some of the questions were simple, such as “what role does God have in your life?” “What are your strengths and weaknesses?” And “what do you think about couples who live together?” As we sat there talking, I felt at ease and sensed everyone else did too. It was a relaxing and informative exercise. Grillo then asked us to get back in the circle and talk about what we have learned from this exercise. Some made comments like “I am glad we did this because I got to know him/her better”, which was the message and purpose of this exercise.

As we came to a closing, Padre Pedro walked in and joined us. One of the guys, Rafael, had a special treat. He prepared to sing two songs of prayer to close the meeting. He asked us to relax and close our eyes and grillo turned off the lights. We all did so and he began his song. When he was done, we applauded him and stood up for our closing prayer. Padre Pedro led by reciting the Our Father, followed by the Hail Mary. We all held hands as we were praying. Once it was over, the father announced it was time to give each other the sign of peace by shaking hands. We all gave each other a kiss on the cheek. He then closed the meeting with a sign of the cross and a blessing.

All St. Ann's youth group meetings are similar to the structure above. When there is a new person at the meetings they will play an icebreaker game for everyone to relax and feel comfortable. The opening prayer is done by the leader of the day asking for the blessing of the group and their mission to follow God's path as a youth group. Their main goal is to get to know and understand the Bible. They are dedicated to teaching biblical lessons and moral teachings. By using teamwork among the leaders to get the lesson plans done and the different exercises to analyze biblical verses and their interpretations, they have created a solid group. Padre Pedro usually does the closing prayers but when he is not there the group leader does it and then asks anyone if they will like to add something to the prayer. The group is almost exclusively run by the youth themselves. Padre Pedro does not lead them; instead he advises them as needed and guides them in the spiritual lessons and the retreats.

There are special occasions where there are visitors or celebrations, which add excitement to the regular meetings. Visitors are another vital part of the youth group. From time to time visitors come in to offer their knowledge on group organization or how

to attract more youths. Most visitors are from the LaSalle Academy, a brotherhood fraternity that is dedicated to training young men to become spiritual leaders. They are located throughout the world but the majority of the guests have been from the Dominican Republic. Ezequiel, Victor's older brother, is an active member of LaSalle and works at their child after-school center in Homestead. He is usually the link between the LaSalle Academy and St. Ann's. He has brought in at least three brothers and has even traveled to the Dominican Republic to attend training in leadership development.

On a few occasions, there have been visitors from other churches or from other groups at St. Ann's like the couple/marriage group. For one meeting the leader from the couples' group offered to explain the troubles of the world and why we [the group] should become more active in making peace even if it is only in our homes. For a dramatic presentation she set a beautiful stuffed rabbit on fire to demonstrate how young children were being burned and killed in the Middle East because of the war. While the group gasped in shock she said that this was the only people would react if they saw it up close, only this was a stuffed animal and not a child. Why then do we ignore the news and act unconcerned to what is going on around the world? She made her point and everyone agreed that they need to become more aware and active in doing good around them.

Although the Protestant church, Iglesia Mexicana Pentecostal is slightly different, it shares the same message: God has given us everything we have, therefore we should give back by doing good deeds for others. The method used to arrive at this conclusion, however distinguishes between the two church structures. Being an independent Pentecostal church, IMP lacks the support and stability that a Catholic church has. This

church also has a much smaller congregation. At its peak it may hold twenty members. Its youth group is usually three to five kids and almost all under 16 years old. They are, however, more close-knit than the Catholic congregation. Largely because they are a much smaller number they can afford to work with one another more closely. In every service you can witness the togetherness. They welcome you as part of their family, which as described by Omar is what he enjoys most about the church. It is this feeling of family and home that brings the same members every Sunday.

The youth group at IMP meets every Sunday morning from 10:00 AM to 12:30 PM. The youth group, which they refer to as Sunday school, is usually held outside the church on the grass. Oscar, the youth group leader, sets up a table and chairs right alongside the church so that they do not interfere with the adult bible study going on inside the church. When it rains or it is too cold for them to do so they will set up inside in a corner curtained off by drapes.

When I arrived at the youth group for the first time I met up with Oscar, who has invited me to observe their Sunday school where he claims that all the students are Mexican. Oscar is a big man (over 250 pounds) in his early thirties with dark hair and rough hands. He was wearing a dark t-shirt and a pair of jean shorts. Like everyone else there, we were all informally dressed and very comfortable. He is a nice, down-to-earth man. When I got there I took a seat inside the church. There were some adults already there, around ten. I wondered why they were present, since this is supposed to be Sunday school for children. The pastor's wife began the service. She is also a big woman with dyed and permed light brownish hair and a blue dress. She had a very concentrated look on her face while she begins the service with a song. The song was a solo with

background music from the guitar and drums. No one sang along, although some joined in with tambourines.

She read from the bible a passage, Jeremiah 22. This chapter was about evangelizing and preaching the word of God, in order to be granted access to heaven. The entire passage was long and repetitive. It is hard for me to fully understand the specifics of the passage because of the terminology, but the message was clear. She emphasized that God wants us to go out there and tell people about him and this is the justification for going to schools, plazas and speaking the word of the Lord.

At first it felt like a regular service and I wondered if this was the Sunday school they spoke about, but it wasn't. Right after the scripture she asked for the children to go outside for Sunday school and the adults to stay put. Oscar summoned me to go with him. I asked him what do the adults do while we are in class and he told me that they also receive Sunday school.

We went outside and sat around the table. The table was a regular pull out, like a picnic table. The chairs were metal fold up chairs and we sat around on the grass by the side of the church. This area where the church is located is somewhat hidden next to the garbage dumps of the camp, not really an ideal place to have a church.

According to Oscar most of the kids live or have lived in this camp. They are a regular teenage group. The boys quickly clump together when taking a seat. They began to talk and make jokes. There is only one girl and she appears very mature for age, thirteen. She speaks and behaves in a much older fashion. There are only eight kids present. Oscar says that this is the normal size, actually more than usual. He told me that they are still pretty new in starting the youth group, but plan to grow. He even showed

me where they plan to build a tent for the class meetings. They plan to convert the area behind the church to use as his classroom. He is just waiting for the money to be able to begin building. This area right now is being used as a garbage site. There is cardboard lying around, as well as broken chairs.

We sat down and Oscar introduced me and asked if I would present myself and tell the group why I was there. I did so and explained that I was there to observe for the project that I was working on. I explained as simply as possible, as the children there were mostly under 15 years old. Oscar then asked that I fully participate in the discussion, which I did. I imagined that he wants me to give my opinions and share with rest of the group, as well as read the scriptures with him.

The kids are pretty young; there were only two kids who were seventeen. The rest were broken down as follows: a 12 year-old, three 13 year-olds, a 14 year-old, and a 15 year-old. There was only one girl and seven boys. All are of Mexican descent and are from working class families. I made this assumption because of their clothes; they were simple and non-brand names. The girl, Sonia, was wearing a skirt that looked handmade. The boys were all around the early teens and some were showing signs of their teen behavior. Some of the guys were making paper planes and talking during the discussion. The girl on the other hand was very attentive and involved in the class.

The discussion was on “El don de la generosidad,” which translated means, the gift of generosity. Everyone has a book that was his or her textbook entitled “El Embajador”. Every week has a lesson plan and a guide to follow. The topic was centered on the gift of giving to others and receiving eternal life for doing so. There were three scriptures for discussion: Romans 12:6-8, 10, 13; 2 Corinthians 9:6-15; Hebrew

13:16; 1 Juan 3:17. They all took turns reading a specific passage, which I was also a part of. They were all in Spanish. The first passage (Romans) related to having the gift of generosity. This is the gift that God has given us but we must learn to use it wisely by giving to others and being generous. The second passage (Corinthians) was very specific: “he who give a little will only get a little, therefore we must give what we want in return.” They use the metaphor of a farmer who plants a few seeds will only get a few crops. The third passage (Hebrew) was simple: “do good and God will be pleased.” The moral was consistent for all the readings. Basically, give without question and God will grant you eternal life.

Oscar led the discussion by lecturing on the importance of this value and asking for our feedback. At the end of the readings Oscar asked the kids their opinions about it and we discussed it for a while. He made us get into groups of two. Our task was to write down three ways we could praise God if we did not have money. I worked with Sonia who is thirteen and plays the drum at the church. She is only one of the many talented members of her family. Her dad also participates in the church choir by playing the guitar and singing.

We worked on our task and came up with more than three ways we could praise God. Actually she immediately wrote about five things without even thinking, including “ to praise him and preach to others the goodness of his word. To be kind to one another and pray to him.” She was eloquent for her age, I was impressed with the way she expressed herself at such a young age. We shared with the others our answers and exchanged ideas. The other three groups gave more or less the same answers. The younger group of 13 and 14 year olds said sacrifice an animal and we all laughed.

At the end of the discussion I asked if they could present themselves to me by stating their name, age and nationality. All are of Mexican descent, all born in the U.S. except one who was born in DF, Mexico. Three of the young men were born in Texas, with parents who were also from Texas. The youth group at IMP has not had any visitors, but their focus is on evangelization and spreading the word of God. Doing so in their minds, will grant them access to God's Kingdom. All the meetings that I attended at IMP followed the same structure. It was a predictable pattern with different topics for each meeting. IMP also has few barbeques and food outings for special events like Mother's day or Easter. These are usually held at a hermana's (sister's) house.

Gender roles

When asked directly, both groups claim that there are no important differences between men and women. In the youth groups, however, I observed how women were expected to be submissive to men. At one meeting at IMP I was shocked that Oscar preached how women need to serve man because of Eve's betrayal. The topic of the day was temptation and how we should try to avoid it at all costs. The first passage we read was when Jesus went to the desert and was tempted by Satan. Jesus hadn't eaten for forty days and nights and was hungry. Satan dared him to make bread out of rocks if he was indeed the Son of God. Satan went on to tempt him three more times and Jesus rejected him each time. Oscar said that even though we were not Jesus, we could avoid and reject temptations as well.

Oscar began a lecture on why it is wrong to worship Saints and have crosses and altars at home because the Bible says that it is wrong. He then went into how women were submissive to men because it says so in the Bible. His justification is that Eve fed

Adam the apple so therefore women were the reason for humans becoming sinners.

Women are forever punished to serve men, but men in return are to treat women like queens and do right by them. I could not help but put a “yeah right” face on and Oscar noticed. He looked at me and said, “that is what it says in the Bible.”

At St. Ann’s there was no direct reference to women’s roles in the youth group but on one occasion there was a discussion of the role of clergy in the Catholic Church, such as priests and nuns. One young girl in the group asked why women couldn’t be priestesses or hold any other higher position than a nun. The brother from LaSalle who was the presenter for that day responded by explaining that only men could be priests because this is how Jesus chose his disciples, He didn’t choose women, only men. Therefore women were limited to being the backbone of the church as nuns or Sunday school teachers, but they were not to be in the forefront.

Mexico has a cultural tradition that women serve their husbands and take care of the children. I believe that this custom is reinforced by religious literature, which claims that Eve was the cause of contemporary women’s roles. As Oscar made clear that day and on other occasions, for example, the creation story of Adam and Eve has influenced why things are the way they are presently. At one youth group meeting Oscar claimed that women are burdened with menstruation and labor pains because of Eve’s betrayal. When I disagreed with that comment by putting on a face of disagreement he asked me to read a passage in the Bible that he interprets as God punishing mankind because of Eve. His conclusion was that this is why women shall be submissive to men because it was a woman who deceived man.

In Mexico there is still a tradition that women should be dedicated to the family and not seek equal rights or even a profession. Even though times are changing and there has been a great increase in women in the work force there remains an underlying custom for men to be those in power.

Leadership and Outreach

Padre Pedro is the only person in charge and responsible for St. Ann's. He carries a heavy load and is overworked but never shows it. He is always willing to offer his help and be there for the congregants, especially the youth. He is admired by the congregation and the youth groups for his kind and down to earth demeanor. Members of other Catholic Churches in the area choose to perform their baptisms or other sacraments at St. Ann's because they like the Father's style and personality. At a time when the Catholic Church is going through a rough time, you will never notice anything is wrong at St. Ann's. The congregation is always lively and hopeful. Their inspiration comes from the will of the Father and the nuns. The nuns are a group of three women from the Guadalupan order who work to serve the community by teaching them the proper ways of the Church. Although their efforts are purely liturgical, e.g. how to say a prayer properly or sing the correct note in a hymn, they provide the structural support at St. Ann's.

Padre Pedro is a prime example of leadership and dedication to the community. From him, the youth group has learned the value and meaning of helping others. He is always present at every group meeting. He advised the group to go out and set up youth groups at every camp and they did. The camp groups meet on different days and he is present at every meeting. Recently the youth group organized a smaller group of individuals who go to homes within the migrant labor camps of people who have shown

interest, and they hold prayer sessions. They read Bible passages and interpret what it means to them. Padre Pedro has taught the youth group to focus on the spiritual needs of the youth and to promote evangelism by forming these groups.

Outreach from the church comes in many forms but mainly from the same group of individuals. The congregation as a whole is not primarily involved in the community; they are the community. Because St. Ann's is not a wealthy church it depends on the volunteerism of its people. The people are usually so busy working and many don't have the time or strength to come together in groups at the church, except for a few individuals. These individuals are the youth group, and on a few occasions the adult prayer groups.

The youth group performs, arranges, cooks and sells food at every event at St. Ann's. They are in charge for putting together the plays, bake sales, youth retreats and games. During the three days in December of festivities for the Virgin de Guadalupe the youth group set up the stage where mass was going to be held, painted the background image of the Virgin and designed the back of a pick up truck that was used as a shrine to lead the procession in her honor. Much of their dedication to help out in the church stems from their faith that the Virgin is responsible for all their livelihoods; for this they continue to be active in the church.

Pastor Gonzalez at IMP is a Mexican-American who hails from Texas, as does most of the congregation. He has been preaching for the last twenty years and converted to Pentecostalism from Catholicism like much of the congregation. Similar to St. Ann's, IMP's members are mostly Mexican migrant workers but at IMP they are second or third generation, in contrast to St. Ann's mostly immigrant congregation. Most are fluent in

English and have a legal immigration status. Yet they have the same socioeconomic status as their ancestors. Working blue-collar jobs and struggling to make ends meet, these members cannot be very active in the church. They are however completely dedicated to evangelization.

Evangelization exists in most religious institutions, but at IMP it is the main priority, as is the case with Pentecostalism generally. IMP members are obligated to go out and spread the word or else face the possibility of not being saved or going to Heaven. The pastor himself has been arrested several times for preaching the Bible in public places. He admitted to me that although he has gotten into trouble with the law he would not stop spreading the word of God. It is his duty as a Christian and he is secure that God will protect him from any harm. He definitely must have a guardian angel as he claims to have, because on one occasion he was held at gunpoint in a residential neighborhood because he was reading Bible scriptures. Unwilling to change, he equips himself with a bullhorn and amplifiers that he straps to the back of his pick-up. He goes to strip malls, residential areas, and migrant camps, anywhere that people will listen.

From the altar he preaches the importance of this outreach because it is the only way that it will get them into Heaven. The youth group tries to do its part. Omar one of the older kids, told me he distributes pamphlets from the church at school. He only hangs out with kids from the youth group. The three oldest kids who are 17 and 18 years old go to the same school. I asked him if converting from Catholicism to Pentecostalism has changed him. He replied firmly, "yes!" He is proud to be a "Christian," i.e. a Protestant, not a Catholic. Although, it caused him some discomfort at first, he is forever changed.

In the beginning some old friends teased him about becoming Christian. He faced the same pressures any kid his age faces. Yet, he stood his ground. His willingness to evangelize comes from his faith. He knows it is for the better. He is secure that he is saved. Like most Pentecostals, they will assure you that they are saved and will go to Heaven. They want to spread this message and share it with the world.

Although this is the main form of outreach, it is not the only one. The pastor and his son Oscar both assured me that they often receive visiting pastors from Central America and collect money to send back to their churches. Pastor Gonzalez also proudly proclaims that he has trained three fellow leaders who now have their own church in Mexico. He has also taken in families who recently arrived from their homeland and had no place to stay. He has oriented and advised them on American society. This is his personal outreach to which he stands committed to because it is God's will.

When I asked why are they dedicated to evangelizing, Oscar the pastor's son says that it is what God wants. "To do so like the way Jesus Christ did when he walked the earth and get involved in the community no matter what color or religion. To be a good servant to God, spiritually, physically and financially, only when we can learn to master that, then we can master God's grace."

Portraits of Mexican Youths

Individuals in the two youth groups I worked with, not surprisingly, were very religious. A core of individuals came to nearly every youth group meeting. They all expressed the importance of faith and God in their individual lives. In the Catholic Church the youth provided the bulk of the labor for all the church's events. They organized feast day festivities, food and bake sales, retreats, and put together and

performed plays and shows for special events like Easter and Christmas. The Protestant church did not have so many events. Their civic engagement focused exclusively on evangelization. The youth leaders, nevertheless, expressed their profound commitment to church and God. Their ethnic identity, however, was not so directly expressed. The language of the churches was exclusively Spanish and the congregants were virtually all Mexican. The Catholic Church centrally celebrated Mexican holidays, most notably the feast day of the Virgin of Guadalupe, December 12th. The Protestant church gave less emphasis to its ethnic roots, but individual interviews revealed their importance.

The following paragraphs provide biographical profiles of the leaders of each of the churches' youth groups. The profiles focus on individual histories, their relationship to the church, and their conceptions of ethnic identity. The section also describes the activities of the youth groups in each church. In short, these ethnographic data reveal that ethnic identity is a strong motivating force that influences whether or not they become civically involved with the greater community. The fact that the church reinforces their ethnic identity is the key factor that justifies the purpose of this study and the end result that religious institutions can be a tool to help immigrant youths adjust and adapt to American life.

I have changed a couple of names of the individuals to protect their privacy but most of them allowed me to use their real names with the hope that their stories will help others understand other cultures and become more accepting.

Victor

Victor is 23 years old and arrived nine years ago from San Nicolas, Guanajuato, Mexico. His father was working in Mexico City when the company he worked for went

bankrupt. He felt that he had no option other than to head for the States in search of work. He arrived in Homestead as a field worker while Victor and his family stayed in Mexico. The dad sent money for the first three years but soon became lonely and wanted to be reunited with his family. He sent for them but Victor and his siblings were reluctant to come. They didn't want to leave Mexico or their friends. When they arrived, they faced culture shock, depression and loneliness. Victor's way of combating these feelings was through soccer.

I think at the moment in time I was playing a lot of soccer and that was my escape from the house, because when I first got here I was very bored. So I began to play soccer and it became my life.... it was play, play, play. I wasn't interested in that stuff [youth group], it seemed boring to me. Better to play than to listen to boring lectures, which is why I was so resistant at first.⁷

At first church was not something for him. His focus was soccer; it was his only way of escaping from home and dealing with his anxiety about living in a new country.

Over there I had a lot of liberty and a lot of hanging out in the streets and when we got here it was from home to school and from school back home. On the weekends I went with my dad wherever, to church or do laundry. For us it was very hard...we became desperate. We would cry because we wanted to go back home but our family was here. So we were looking for an escape, a way out of the house. For me it was soccer and my brother lasted a while without going to church and then he found a youth group that he kept going to but I didn't. I think more than anything we were looking for something to distract us.

He entered high school and learned some English but he is still not fluent enough to speak comfortably in front of others. Everyone in his family was illegal for several years until they decided that it might be best for them to apply for residency. This became a priority when Ezequiel, Victor's older brother and Victor had just finished high school and began to look for work. Fortunately, Victor and his brothers received

⁷ All quotes are taken from interviews conducted from September 2001 to July 2002.

residency about a year ago. They celebrated by returning to Mexico for a family vacation. They hadn't been back since they arrived, over nine years earlier.

Victor now works for a government-funded after-school center in the South Dade camp where he supervises children from the ages of five to twelve. He helps them with their homework, gives them snacks and waits for their parents to pick them up. The kids all reside in the camp where all the residents are either farm workers or nursery workers.

When I asked Victor if he would become an American citizen he said only if he decides to finish his schooling here and then get a job. Although he believes that he would be able to find a good job in Mexico, he is uncertain. If the opportunity were to come up he thinks he would go back to Mexico because his girlfriend lives there. He hasn't thought about college because he is working to help at home. He divides his time between work, St. Ann's and soccer practice.

His journey towards religion has been a slow but fruitful path where he is now content with his relationship with God and the Catholic Church.

Well I believe it has been the biggest step that I have ever taken coming to the United States. I wouldn't say that I liked the Church when I was over there [Mexico]. I would just go to mass on Sunday. I think it wasn't until I got here that I began to get involved in the church. It started with curiosity that I began to participate in the youth group and I liked the significance of it and to learn more about the Catholic Church and God. That is when I began to get a taste for religion. And I think that was the biggest step to say hey I like this, this is my religion; finally I know what my religion means and does and I like it.

Now religion has become the most important part of his life. It is something that he loves and, in his words, could not live without. He credits religion for making him a stronger person and appreciating life.

Ruby

Ruby is a vivacious young Mexican American who has deep roots in Homestead. Her family, she claims, was one of the original Mexican families to arrive in Homestead to work in the fields. She is young, only 20, but has learned what it is to have responsibilities. She works odd jobs and gives most of her paycheck to her mother who then distributes it amongst the household. She has a huge extended family that resides in Homestead and Texas. Her Mexican descent comes from her great grandparents but she affirms that she is Mexican without question.

She studied with another youth group member, Vilma, at a cosmetology school in Miami but has not found a cosmetologist job yet. She met Vilma at the church youth group and they became immediate friends. She comes to the youth group for socializing and enjoys the family-like nature of the group. Like most of the other members, her closest friends are from the youth group. She enjoys the humbleness of the church and that the majority is Mexican, “her people.” Religion is a big part of her life, which she holds on to with adamant faith. In her own words:

Faith plays an important role, maybe as for my father, my father is an alcoholic and I have faith that one day he will change. But I think [religion], it plays a very important role in that sense of my life.

She has participated in many church activities including being in the church choir and being coordinator of the youth group for about two years now. When she was thirteen and fourteen, she coordinated the younger youth groups. Religion gives her hope in dealing with family problems and being successful in life. She plans to go to Miami Dade Community College next fall but is unsure what she would like to study. Her main concern is her father who has suffered the consequences of being an alcoholic. He has

lost jobs and recently his driver's license was revoked. For the past five years, he has worked in the agricultural fields as an unskilled laborer. His aspirations to become a trucker and better provide for his family were lost to alcoholism.

Regardless of the problems that Ruby faces at home, her family is still economically better off than the rest of the group. Due to the fact that her family has been here for several generations and she speaks English, she can easily manage the American way of life and its internal structure. She researches financial aid options, colleges, and negotiates car payments with banks and lenders, which many recent arrivals may not be familiar with. Ironically, she has faced reverse discrimination as other Hispanics have shunned her because she speaks English fluently. This was clearly evident in the cosmetology school she attended in Miami where the majority of the students spoke only Spanish.

Again I was going to school up there [Miami], I was told that the classes were going to be bilingual in English and Spanish so the class was mixed with both if you were Spanish and didn't speak English you had a Spanish book, it was all in Spanish and if you spoke English you had an English book. Well it was very hard for me because even though I speak perfect Spanish but you know, English! I am in America you know what I mean...so my book was in English and the majority was all Spanish speaking people and there were only two or three of us who had an English book and they would forget about us. The lesson would always be given in Spanish completely and it wouldn't have bothered me because like I said I know perfect Spanish and I understood the lessons well, but the terms and stuff that were in my book that were going to be on the test were all in English.

They knew that I knew Spanish and that would get them angry. Because when I ask for the lesson in English they would be like "ugh" and say why if you know Spanish. They are really close-minded and when we did do the lesson in English and if someone was reading out of the book they would just, they didn't care they would start talking and making noise and interrupt the lesson, you don't know what I mean!

Unfortunately this is the conflict many other Mexican Americans face. It is the constant struggle to belong and be accepted in the group, but which group? And if you choose one what will the other say? At the youth group, she feels like she doesn't have to choose. They accept her how she is and it is a way to isolate herself from the rest of the world at least for a couple of hours every Wednesday night.

Minerva

Minerva is twenty-three and one of the youth group leaders. She is the only one in the group who has a college education. She hopes to pursue a Masters in psychology. She is from a small town, Rincon de Guayaba, in the state of Mexico, Mexico. Much like Victor, her father was the first in the family to make the trip to the States in search of a better life. She came here when she was nine and a half with her mother and brother. Her parents were able to benefit from the amnesty that was given in the early 1990s but she and her brother were not given that opportunity. They were left with no legal status until recently when they finally received residency. For Minerva it was a godsend because she had hoped to go to college and would not be able to do so without that status, which she received days before her high school graduation.

It took years before we got our residency just in time to go to college, too. That was like four years ago, four and a half years ago. I think it has been five years since we have our residency and we prayed to God to get it because we wanted to go to college. Soon we were graduating and getting ready to graduate high school and we thought we would not be able to do anything. But thank God that we did get them in time and my brother and I were able to go to college. It is a big struggle for immigrants that my parents had to go through.

Her parents found work as farm workers here in the United States. They now work in the nurseries because of the better wages and more stable work. While she was

in high school, she and her brother would work after-school in the fields alongside their parents to help out the family. Her family has struggled, economically like most Mexican migrant workers that have come to Homestead. Trying to make ends meet, they have had to work hard but unfortunately they have also experienced the harsh realities of America. Minerva's father thought he could improve his economic situation by starting his own agricultural business, growing and selling vegetables. He ended up losing over \$10,000 to people and companies who refused to pay him claiming that his products were bad. Minerva believes that they were just con men who stole the money from her father because they refused to give back the products; instead they threw them away.

When I met Minerva she was quiet and shy but as I got to know her I saw ambition and potential. She has combated stereotypes and family obstacles in search of an education and continues to fight to better herself. Unfortunately most Mexican families are *machista* and believe women should be housewives and that there is no need for them to go to school. Minerva told me on one occasion that her family wished she would get married instead of going to college. Nevertheless, Minerva broke the tradition; she decided that she wanted more out of life. When she had the opportunity to go to college she jumped at the chance. She attended Florida International University and paid for it by working part time and by taking out loans that were only available if you are a permanent resident. She thanks God and St. Ann's for the support that got her ahead. When I questioned her faith and what role it has in her life, she claims that it was undoubtedly the pinnacle of her life.

Faith has a very important role! My faith I can tell you that...has taught me so much as far as having anywhere you go where you have problems sometimes. Especially as young people, you encounter a lot of things. You encounter

confusion, sometimes you don't know where you are standing but with faith I feel that like even if you get to a point where you feel that way you have faith, I will be okay. No matter how hard the situation is I will be okay. There is a God in heaven who will take care of me. If things happen, they are happening for a reason so let me just try to relax and cool it off for a little bit and it will be okay.

Minerva is now training to become one of the coordinators of the group alongside her boyfriend Davino. She is very active in the group and planning the lessons with the other group leaders. She carries a small picture of the Virgin Mary with her at all times to remind her that she is always accompanied and never alone. Minerva is dedicated to St. Ann's and hopes to remain so. When I first met her I was certain that she could be in the process of entering the convent because of her modest clothing and minimal make up. She wears long skirts and sweaters that make her seem reserved but she is an extraordinary person who has overcome the struggles from outside and inside her family to achieve the "American dream."

Davino

Davino is a prime example of how Mexican undocumented youth live in Homestead. He has encountered the INS at least four times but is not deterred or threatened by them. He is a warm, outgoing twenty-six old who has faced discrimination, hostility and stereotypes. He comes to St. Ann's to get away from all that and to socialize with his friends and be with God, although his own family members often tease him about his loyal religious practices.

My mother often says you are going to become a saint. My brother teases me about becoming a saint; well they used to spend their time doing that but not anymore. They came to church and saw what we do so now they know that I come here to learn and be with God. But before they would always say here comes the saint.

He now feels a stronger relationship with God because he has dedicated himself to living a true Catholic lifestyle. He has admitted to me that it is very difficult because those temptations are always around and even in his family but he is committed to live the right way. His girlfriend Minerva is also a constant reinforcement. He is devoted to her and plans to one day marry her. He is good friends with the young men from the group so they are always supporting one another against the pressures outside the church. They share the same cultural background, which is a strong bond between the group members.

Davino arrived in the States when he was seventeen. He is from Ciudad Victoria, Tamaulipas, Mexico, which is right across from Brownsville, Texas. His family traveled back and forth between Mexico and the United States for work on a daily basis. His family moved to Brownsville, Texas ten years ago but then decided to return to Mexico while his father headed for Homestead. Soon after, his dad requested that they come for good. It was then that they made the move to Homestead, Florida. Everyone in the household has residency except for Davino and his younger brother, who are struggling to find work and live without complications.

Davino has encountered numerous problems with work, school and discrimination in the United States. He survives by working illegally for construction companies, nurseries and some fieldwork. His current job is at a construction company where he has fought with a couple of coworkers because of their hostility. Unfortunately many Mexicans encounter Cubans who, according to the Mexicans, despise them. This results in many confrontations among the Mexican and Cuban community in Homestead.

Davino explained his problem with Cubans at his workplace one day when he got into a physical altercation:

At work the Cubans are very arrogant. I don't have anything against anybody but we have been at work and they start talking. I get desperate and tell them to shut their trap and they tell me you are nobody to tell me to shut up. But it is like they get paid to yell. They drive me crazy, maybe I am wrong and they are like that talking really loud but I think they exaggerate a lot. They always say they will kill Fidel and I say well why don't you.

Among the Mexican youths interviewed as part of this research I found that most of them feel some level of hostility and/or discrimination from other Hispanic groups and/or the Anglo population. Davino has also confronted a White boss who was racist.

I have gotten into a lot of fights at work. One time I fought with an American because he was on top of a scaffold working and he told me to get back but I didn't understand, I didn't really speak English and he called me a "wetback". I was furious and I began yelling back and punched him in the face, he wasn't expecting it. We fought and I won because I hit him first, he hit me too but I know that... he said he felt bad for calling me that but I felt worse for letting him get to me like that. I should have said, "yeah I am a wetback and what" and that would have been it.

Davino has been stopped by INS at least four times and always manages to get out of being detained. He thanks God for his luck and strength to keep struggling. He has recently started the application process for residency. He wants to go back to school and get a better job. He is enrolled in Miami Dade Community College for English classes and hopes that after he learns English, things will get a little easier for him. St. Ann's has helped him tremendously spiritually but also financially as well. He has a good relationship with Padre Pedro who has been not only his spiritual advisor but also a friend. On some occasions when things got really bad at home economically, Padre Pedro has given him money from his own pocket. Davino's commitment to St. Ann's

comes from his strong beliefs but for the youth group and Padre Pedro who is always there for all the kids.

Juan Miguel

Juan Miguel was one of the first members of the St. Ann's youth group. He has since left the group because he is now a seminarian at the St. John Vianney College in Miami. Juan Miguel's passage to the United States has been a laborious journey that began in Morelia, the capital of the state of Michoacán in Mexico. He lived with his mother in a small house where they struggled to have food everyday. He is the only child and never knew his father so he decided to look towards the United States as his way out. He was able to finish high school in Mexico and never was forced to do any difficult work like he has encountered here.

He has an aunt and uncle in Homestead who paid a coyote fifteen hundred dollars to bring him over. He didn't tell his mother until a week before his departure because he knew that she would object. He was told to go to Ciudad Victoria by the border and wait for a call that would tell him where to meet the coyote. He left with a book bag of personal items and few articles of clothing. He crossed the border by swimming across Rio Grande like so many other Mexicans before him. I was fascinated by his personal account of the crossing because he detailed the highly organized business of border crossing.

We had to get rid of our bags because the place where we crossed was really deep. I am not such a good swimmer. We waited for the INS agents to leave and we crossed. It was very deep. Women and children used old tires to cross so they could float. That is how women and children cross along with the bags. There are people that work in that. There is alongside the river men who sell old tires for you to cross. It is all very organized.

Once we crossed we ran for like an hour to a house where we spent the night. We ate and changed there. The next day we got in a car, in one car they will put ten people where they take you to another house. You keep doing this until we reached the desert. We walked the desert for two days. Along the way there are spots where you know people rested. There were old bags of Doritos and empty soda cans along the way. Then we got into disguised cars, I went in a phone company van until we got to Houston five hours later. There you go with “your” coyote who will take you to your destination. Everyone who was going to Florida got into the van. We took the long way so we wouldn’t be watched. I got to Homestead at one in the morning a few days later.

Juan Miguel began to work in the fields and in construction jobs like many other recent newcomers. He is still undocumented but he hopes to receive a religious visa through the Catholic Church.

His journey to the Seminary was a twist of fate. It was not his intention at all. After working for several months in Homestead he grew desperate. He was not used to physical labor and began looking for a way out. He began attending St. Ann’s youth group and soon became more involved with the church than anything else.

I stopped working for a long time to dedicate myself to the church. Until the Father told me first is work it doesn’t matter if you don’t do much here. I told him that I enjoyed what I was doing and it didn’t matter if I wasn’t making money.

He contemplated the Seminary for six months before deciding to ask Padre Pedro how he could get more involved. He was interviewed by the Bishops of Miami and evaluated by a panel of psychologists to determine if he is capable of becoming a priest. They asked him several hundred questions and finally was accepted. He just finished his first year at the Seminary. He doesn’t know yet if he is ready to become a priest but he leaves that in God’s hands.

Omar

Omar is the youngest of all the kids I interviewed. He is seventeen and is a junior at South Dade High School. He is Mexican American but prefers to be called Chicano. He is committed to Iglesia Mexicana Pentecostal where he is the vice president of the youth group. Although the majority of the attendants are under fifteen years old, Omar is one of the three older students who are in charge of the group. The youth group's leader Oscar lets the president and Omar give class from time to time. Omar's family converted to Pentecostalism seven years ago when the oldest daughter began attending Iglesia Mexicana Pentecostal. Since then his faith has grown strong and according to his own words "it keeps him on God's path."

It has been a really good experience for me because before I would do things without even thinking about it and once I did it I wouldn't feel anything like anything was wrong. But as I started going further into the church the things that I liked to do is like I would have a second thought something would come to me and say no you can't do this, you are not supposed to do this. And I would feel butterflies in my stomach as second thoughts of doing of what I used to like to do. And its been a big experience 'cause I can see my fellow peers tell me that I am different that I don't try to show something that I am not. So I try to show them how I have changed.

He has encountered the pressures of high school and it has not been easy to always take the high road. His old friends teased him about becoming Christian but Omar is secure that he has done the right thing. His friends now are Juan and his brother Everado who all belong to the youth group. Since they all go to the same school they hang out together virtually always.

Omar's family is made up of hard working agricultural laborers who arrived in Homestead from California where they still have most of their family. Omar's father has since become a construction worker where he can earn more income. Omar and his older

brother work alongside their father on their days off from school. Their family is close knit and is centered around the church, especially after they learned about the youngest daughter's illness. Omar's little sister was diagnosed with epilepsy and suffers from severe attacks and has been hospitalized several times. He believes that belonging to the church has helped him deal with her illness.

Yeah that has happened to us many times 'cause my little sister we would come home and...like we would go out to eat or the movies and on the way she would get sick because she gets seizures...we would come home and turn off everything and start praying. We would feel, well personally I would feel the presence of God and after that she would come over it and relax, go to sleep and it has happened many times here.

Omar plans to graduate high school and attend college. He hopes that he might be able to receive an athletic scholarship to play baseball. He is currently on the baseball team at his high school.

Oscar

I met Oscar at Centro Campesino, a non-profit organization that is dedicated to helping immigrants and their families adjust to life in the United States. Oscar is the director of STEP AHEAD, a program devoted to farm worker's children age 14 to 21 in career development. This center helps high school dropouts get their General Educational Development (GED) and focuses them on achieving higher goals such as college or a career. They also find mentors for the kids to "show them that the camp is not the only place where they have to live. There are many places out there, there are other areas that are different to brighten their futures so they can look forward to something."

Oscar himself was raised a farm-worker child. He grew up to work in the fields, packinghouses, fishing boats and other odd jobs where he can make a living. He volunteered at Centro Campesino for five years before he was offered the job he has now. He wants to help these children realize that the doors aren't closed, that there is a future for them. He understands that it is all too easy to fall through the cracks and wind up on drugs or in a gang. He was into both and struggled to overcome that past and move onto a brighter future. He credits his parents who led him to the church where his father has dedicated over twenty years of service.

Like I said when I was young I went to church because mom and dad took me until I got into my teens, which is sad but I must confess I got into drugs and I got into...I don't think I ever quit believing in God but I just felt like I wanted to taste it like when you have that desire to try it no matter how bad or awful it is. It is human for us to try something you have never tried before. And I regret a lot of the things that happen to me and the road I took but I do praise God and thank God that I had a strong faith in my parents who always prayed for me and kept me in their prayers and the Lord had those angels over me.

I have gone through quite a bit, a divorce that I went through because of getting married outside my beliefs. We had such a difference we thought love will overcome but obviously it did not. Love is something you have to work at and feel inside your heart because if it is not there it is not going to work. That is what I have gotten the most out of my religious experience is love. I felt love when I was at crossroads and felt like dirt where I didn't think I meant anything to anybody. And my church and my family members open their arms and their hearts and they supported me when I really needed it.

Oscar is now reformed and attending church on a regular basis and active in all the church activities. He wants to teach his kids those values through religion. For Omar and Juan, Oscar is an inspiration and they value his teachings and take his past as an example of what can happen if they stray away from God. Oscar's father is the pastor at IMP and has been so for over 17 years. Oscar's older brother was the past youth director

until he left a year ago and Oscar has taken over. For him it is another way to help the youth of Homestead have hope and faith. Through God and the church Oscar has turned his life around and has recently remarried and is expecting a second child.

CHAPTER V

BEING MEXICAN

Mexican is our beliefs, our morals, I think and, of course, physically the way we dress, the way we eat, the music we listen to, the way we talk. Like I said, even though I was raised here and my mom was raised here, we keep a lot of Mexican culture. We try not to lose it because like I said that is where our ancestors are from. You know that is what is in my blood. We believe very strongly in that way. We have the same things as the real Mexicans from Mexico believe in. We try to keep the same traditions.⁸

Ruby was born here, yet identifies herself as Mexican. She will acknowledge that technically she is Mexican-American, but her identity and culture in her mind is Mexican. Church contributes to the constitution of their Mexican identity. Mexican youths in Homestead are very much dedicated to their churches and see them as second homes. St. Ann's and IMP provide the spiritual, physical, and emotional needs that these youths desire in their lives. They come to church to live freely, to be among peers who accept them for who they are, regardless of their ethnicity or race, age, or sex. Because the groups are exclusively Mexican with the exception of one individual, they have become a "transplanted Mexico" where the youths can express themselves as they perceive themselves to be no matter how the outside world may see them.

St. Ann's, where the entire congregation participates in Mexican traditions and festivals, is a constant support system for their cultural identity. Their ethnicity is celebrated, admired and praised. They are not discriminated against nor looked down-upon, in contrast to the discrimination they face outside the church. These youths have often encountered the harshness of our society's intolerance of newcomers heightened

⁸ Quote taken from Ruby's interview January 28th, 2002.

even further as Mexicans in South Florida have a stigma even among another Hispanic groups. In spite of Homestead being predominately Mexican, newcomer Mexicans have expressed to me discrimination by Mexicans who arrived earlier. At the church, however, they don't face that. They are embraced and welcomed.

As part of the interview I asked specific questions regarding ethnic identity and why they choose a particular identity. They overwhelmingly chose a Mexican identity or affiliation regardless of their birthplace. Not one of the youths claimed "American" as a primary identity choice or even "Hispanic" as a pan-ethnic identity.

Davino, who was born in Mexico, considers himself 100% Mexican. He has encountered many conflicts here with Cubans and Anglo Americans alike. Homestead is his haven, as for most other Mexican youths, because he and they feel comfortable among their own group and don't have to interact frequently with other ethnic groups. On some occasions, however, tensions emerge between ethnic groups, even in Homestead. As I mentioned earlier, Davino has had his encounters with a racist boss and peers who express the negative stereotypes of Mexicans.

Problems at work and outside have enforced his Mexican identity to the point where he has created a wall, a boundary against other ethnic groups. Although his work and activism at St. Ann's has helped him become more tolerant it is a slow process. During the Elían Gonzalez affair in 2000, Cubans were burning the American flag in retaliation for the United States giving Elían back to his father. Davino saw this as an act against the United States and putting his "Mexicanness" aside he wanted to protest against the Cubans.

When I saw that the Cubans were burning the flag, I felt bad. If it weren't for my father who didn't let me go I would have gone [to Miami] and done something. They boil my blood. I got mad because they burn the flag and I began to say things. I had a flag and I was going to put it on my truck and was going to go into Miami with a couple of friends, of course we weren't going with empty hands. But look that was during the time I wasn't going to church. I really didn't have a relationship with the church...I know that I am not in my country but they should respect the people, if they want respect then they have to give it.

Yet on another occasion, when Davino was in Texas visiting family, he came across discrimination from fellow Mexicans. He was at a store with his mother who doesn't speak English when the cashier refused to speak Spanish. Davino felt she was lying because she had a Spanish name and looked "very Indian," a Mexican term referring to indigenous features including skin tone. He wound up arguing with the young lady who indeed turned out to speak Spanish fluently. Davino felt like she was trying to be superior. He responded by affirming, "I speak English and I am a wetback, maybe you are not a wetback but I am." He felt betrayed by his own people, which hurt him more than anyone else refusing to speak to him.

As with other Mexican Americans whom I interviewed, the choice of identifying with one's parent culture or with the hegemonic Anglo is a common one. They acknowledge their American way of life yet firmly state that they are Mexican because of their heritage, the foods they eat at home, the people they hang out with, their language, and their customs. All these symbols are powerful indicators of culture that are constantly used in these young people's lives. This is not a new notion, there have been dozens of theories that argue that second generation children will combine both worlds to create an unique third culture where they are distinct from their parents and the host society's ethnic group.

Portes et al. (2001) argue that reactive formation processes provide a viable basis for collective solidarity and political stabilization in defense of ethnic group interests. This is how the term *Chicano* assumed its popularity in the 1960s and 70s as militant organizations promoted Mexican pride (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). Omar puts his Chicano identity into perspective. I believe he chooses his identity because of his time in California when he visits his family, where he has gained exposure to their way of life.

It is basically almost like a separate [group]...it is weird because Chicanos do things different like in California they are different, their clothing, and the way they dress is different from other Mexicans. Basically a Chicano lifestyle is different from a 100% Mexican. It is basically combining the Mexican and the American together.

In Homestead there are not too many kids who call themselves Chicano. In fact some are dead against it but Omar likes the term and is proud to be called Chicano. As he states below, he encountered cultural conflicts growing up which led him to embrace a hyphenated identity, which he prefers to refer to as Chicano instead of Mexican-American.

As I was growing up it was hard for me. To be able to walk in the streets you had to know how to fight. It was just the way I grew up. When I was growing up there was a lot of gang banging. They were Mexicans and sometimes Puerto Ricans you know but it was very few from other races, it was mostly Mexicans.

In contrast, one young woman whom I interviewed, Noelia, was insulted if anyone dared call her Chicana. She found the term derogatory and inferior. She told me that she didn't like that term and didn't feel comfortable with it. She opts to identify herself as Mexican-American, which according to her includes being born here and having at least one parent from Mexico. She also takes offense to being called a gringa or American. In her own words she said, "she would rather die." When I questioned

why, she firmly stated, “Yeah but I have culture, I have blood, Mexican blood.” She doesn’t believe that Americans have culture.

Noemi: How about White Americans do you see them as having culture?

Noelia: Well they do but I guess that they try to deny it they say oh I am American. I don’t see them celebrating their cultural...Irish for example. Especially the Hispanic community we...like you guys have in Puerto Rico salsa and merengue and Mexicans have Cinco de Mayo and the dances and everything and the Americans I don’t see their culture.

Mexican youths are more likely to adhere to a Mexican identity instead of an Anglo-American identity (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). This conclusion derives from the understanding that this identification is a reactive response to external hostility, in this case, Anglo-American society. If so, then I argue that reactive ethnicity leads to segmented assimilation. Depending on the factors that influences one’s identification we could predict where they will fall within the four labels (parent’s native culture, a hyphenated label, American identity or a pan-ethnic identity such as “Hispanic”) that Portes et al. define. It is obvious in the case of the Mexican youths in Homestead that there is enough evidence to prove negative reception and hostility from Anglos, Cubans and even fellow Mexicans. This hostile environment contributes to the high number of youths who refuse to adopt an American identity or even a hyphenated one.

Davino is a clear example of reactive ethnicity. He prides himself on being Mexican. He carries a Mexican flag on his truck, a Mexican flag bumper sticker and listens to nothing but *ranchero* music. Like Juan Miguel, Victor, and countless others their ethnicity is based on their birthplace. But there are also numerous youths who were born here but who still identify themselves as Mexican. This is the case of Ruby and Omar. The fact that their social environment reinforces their identity is a main factor.

There is constant affirmation of their Mexicanness. Examples of this are seen throughout Homestead, dozens of *taquerías*, international calling centers that cater specifically to Mexicans, Mexican supermarkets, and churches that celebrate Mexican customs and traditions.

Research Questions

To answer the main research questions of this study, I have presented case studies of some of the individuals whom I worked with. How do Mexican youths in Homestead, Florida identify themselves? What are the most important forces influencing ethnic identity? As I presented above their identification can range from a hyphenated label to a singular identification with the parents' native culture. Influencing this decision are educational levels, socioeconomic status, parent's achievement, and so on. An array of variables exists, which influence how the young individual will choose to identify him or herself and how far he or she will integrate into American society. In Table 2 below we can see how the overwhelmingly majority of the youths of Mexican background chose only one Mexican identity.

Table 2. Identification among Mexican Youths at St. Ann's and Iglesia Mexicana Pentecostal

St. Ann's	Mexican	Mexican-American	Hispanic	American
Minerva	X			
Víctor	X			
Ezequiel	X			
Noelia	X	X		
Ruby	X	X		
Juan Miguel	X			
Davino	X			
Iglesia Mexicana Pentecostal				
Omar		X		
Oscar		X		

The individuals who chose only a Mexican identity were all born in Mexico except for Ruby and Noelia. To understand why second generation kids use two identities, I asked Noelia when would she use her Mexican and Mexican-American identity.

I say a few years ago I identified myself as a Mexican I didn't...I guess I was naïve you can say. I knew that I was born here and everything but I was Mexican and then when I started coming to youth group the guys were like you are Mexican-American you were born here. So from then I started saying I am Mexican-American.

I inquired further and asked if this made her feel bad as I suspected it would.

Yes it did because I don't believe in titles. You know for me I could be a Mexican like anybody else. But because they started saying well you were born here.... so I was like okay I am Mexican-American. It is hard because I am in the United States I am not an American because I am Mexican but then in Mexico I am not Mexican. So I say what would my kids be if I marry an American, will they be American? They [the others at youth group] say no they would still be Mexican-American...they will still have that blood there. There is always going to be that blood there, the culture.

Omar and Oscar choose Mexican-American identities. The fact that Oscar's ancestors all originated in Texas and he has only one family member in Mexico supports his choice of biculturalism. On the other hand, Omar who was born here but is a second generation Mexican, considers himself Chicano. He prefers this identification because of its distinctiveness; it is different from just being Mexican or American and because of his exposure to California the label "Chicano" is widespread.

A key factor to influencing their identity choice is how the person in question is received upon arrival to the United States. As I have illustrated in the case studies, a hostile receiving environment can cause a reinforcement of one's native culture as a form of defensive reaction. Even for second-generation children, if the mode of incorporation was negative it is most likely that they will encompass a defensive identity.

Another route would be to simply choose Hispanic as a pan-ethnic identity but as we can see in the case studies presented here no one chose that route. In the case with Homestead, I suggest that a reason why many Mexicans do not choose Hispanic is because they will be lumped together with Cubans, Puerto Ricans and other Hispanic groups that traditionally have been hostile to them. Many of the youths reported having had problems with Puerto Ricans and Cubans. Thus, I believe that this can be an obstacle that prevents them from seeing themselves as equal to these other Hispanic groups and thus they reject a label that implies equality. Second, Mexico carries a very unique culture that is vastly different from any other Latin American country. By having unique traditions and customs, there may be a need or at least pride in being different and standing out.

What role does religion play in the identity formation of these young people? The church is a vital part of these youths' lives. Everyone interviewed acknowledged that the church was his or her second home. It didn't take me long to confirm this. The amount of time these young people put into the activities and events at St. Ann's is astonishing. IMP as well holds a dear part of these youths' lives. They are there at every group meeting, they stay afterwards to help others in the church, and at St. Ann's they truly are the backbone of the church.

On a number of occasions I witnessed how Padre Pedro asked the youth group to take care of something or handle something else. Being that the youth group at St. Ann's is the main group, they look after the younger groups within the labor camps. A few of the members of this group are the leaders of the younger kids. For the annual retreat at St. Ann's, the youth groups were completely in charge of setting everything up, from creating the itinerary to coming up with the money to cover it all. At the special masses they are the ones who decorate the church and coordinate with Padre Pedro on who and when certain events are going to take place.

Their presence at the church encourages them and inspires them to continue their labor. The fact that these are strictly Mexican churches helps them feel at home, in an atmosphere they understand and are comfortable with. Most of the kids acknowledged that they like living in Homestead because the majority is Mexican, but even better would be Texas or California where the overwhelming population is Mexican. It is obvious that they seek a place where they are welcomed and accepted. Whereas outside of church that may not always be possible, at St. Ann's and IMP it is. These religious institutions

provide support and celebrate their Mexican culture. It affirms their Mexicanness by celebrating most of their traditions in a reassuring way.

Hypotheses

I hypothesized three possible situations regarding how Mexican youths in Homestead will integrate into society. First, that the more Mexican youths identify themselves as Mexican, the less likely they will consider participating in American society. This is true for the most part. Most of the kids I interviewed said that regardless of whether they were born here or not they consider themselves Mexican and for the most part they will not identify themselves Americans. Now the longer they are here the more willing they become to accept an American identity. I asked Victor who is from Mexico what would happen if he were here for over twenty years. Would he consider himself American? He said:

Well only God knows. But after twenty years, you change.... right now I feel Mexican but if twenty years go by I don't know if I will still be Mexican. You never know.

In contrast, Noelia, who was born here and considers herself Mexican, maintains "No because I love my culture." At the time of the interview, both the foreign-born Victor and the U.S.-born Noelia expressed a Mexican identity. Contrary to expectations, however, the foreign-born youth, Victor, considers it possible that his identity may become Mexicanized, whereas the US-born Noelia asserts that she will remain Mexican. Identity formation is a collage of various factors that come into play with each other. In this case one's background and view of society shape how much they are willing to change their identities.

Traditional assimilation theory presumes that identity correlates with culture and behavior. An individual who identifies as American is more likely to exhibit American culture and behaviors. Victor and Noelia contradict this presumption. Victor, who currently identifies as Mexican but admits he may adopt an American identity in the future, is more traditionally Mexican and not American. He dresses, speaks and behaves in a Mexican style. He wears few brand names and sports dress shoes even with jeans, which I have seen other recent Mexican arrivals do. Rarely did I see someone who has been in the U.S. for many years wear nice shoes with casual clothing. Victor does not speak English or eat American foods like hamburgers and hot dogs, and he cannot live without soccer. He has permanent residency but is hesitant to apply for citizenship because he doesn't know if he plans to make a life here. I asked Victor what makes him more Mexican and he summarized it as language. The fact that he doesn't speak fluent English allows him to remain Mexican while his family considers his youngest brother who speaks fluent English, American.

Noelia, on the other hand who seems to be completely Americanized rejects American identity. She dresses in modern day clothing, eats typical American food and even celebrates American holidays like July fourth and Thanksgiving with pride. Yet, she doesn't want to call herself American. She had a hard time when some members of the youth group corrected her and told her she was Mexican-American and not Mexican as she had claimed. When I questioned her about what it was to be American she said it was sometimes the way you are educated. Depending on your education she could tell if you are American or not. Yet, she herself who was educated in the U.S. does not call herself American.

My second hypothesis was, the more prejudice and discrimination individuals encounter, the less likely they will want to become American. I believe this is correct due to the responses I received from everyone. Mexicans in the United States are the largest Latino ethnic group yet the most discriminated against and stereotyped. “Mexicans were socially distanced and made to feel inferior and marginal. Thus the children of the immigrants started off socially and psychologically marginalized, and conventional socialization routines were largely unavailable to them” (Suárez-Orozco and Páez, 2002: 100). Discrimination forced Mexican immigrants to congregate in locations separate from the dominant Anglo majority (Suárez-Orozco and Páez, 2002). Mexican immigrants have experienced a negative mode of incorporation not only at the present but for over 100 years (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). This has led Mexicans to suffer from low human, social and cultural capital because they are not part of the host society. Apart from the majority and host society, it was inevitable for Mexican youths to feel a sense of defensiveness and rejection towards them.

As I have presented above, when faced with hostility, the individual will most likely respond with a defensive identity, often embracing his/her native ethnic culture and reject the host society. Davino, who has confronted prejudice on the job, has taken a strong stance on his Mexican identity, going as far as embracing the “wetback” label. Reactive ethnicity is the result of a negative mode of incorporation, which will only lead the individual to further isolate himself from the rest of society (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). Alienation from the host society is harmful to both the host society and the ethnic group in question.

The third hypothesis was: the more important religion is in individuals' lives, the more civically engaged they would be in American society (Bankston III and Zhou, 1995). This can work in various ways. First if religious institutions are promoting activism on the part of its congregation then they can become more civically engaged. However if it is not, then it is up to the individual to take the initiative on his or her behalf to become involved. The importance of religion in these young kids' lives is essential to understanding how they behave outside the church. The churches function as a second home but at the same time serve as a cultural support and enhancer.

Bankston and Zhou (1995) have found that active religious participation can make a significant contribution to ethnic identification, which in turn facilitates positive adaptation of immigrant adolescents to American society by increasing the probability that adolescents will do well in school, set their sights on the future education, and avoid some of the dangers that confront contemporary young people. In St. Ann's it is providing the events and festivals in honor of the Virgin of Guadalupe, which brings followers from all over South Florida and congregants to get involved.

As I stated above, the youth group at St. Ann's is responsible for a number of activities that reflect their involvement to the church and the church community. Providing their time in setting up events and going into the camps for evangelization represents how the church has enabled them to become civically engaged. The fact that the church strengthens their ethnic identity and encourages it is an indicator of how this type of support can lead to civic engagement. Zhou points out that ethnic religious participation as examined in her research with Vietnamese adolescents facilitates adjustment to host society precisely because it promotes cultivation of a distinctive

ethnicity, that, in turn helps young people reach higher levels of academic achievement and to avoid dangerous and destructive forms of behavior” (Bankston III and Zhou 1995).

Furthermore scholars such as Barton (1975) and Smith (1978) argue that ethnic churches, through helping to sustain ethnicity and religious traditions rooted in ethnic religions, have helped ethnic groups adapt to American life and achieved toward mobility. This is clearly the case at IMP and St. Ann’s where the youths are becoming more American than they realize by participating and manipulating the channels of American society by simply being part of a church community. Ethnic identification actually contributes to, rather than inhibits, adaptation to American society and religious participation affects adaptation indirectly by increasing ethnic identification (Bankston III and Zhou 1995).

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to uncover how and why youths of Mexican descent choose solely Mexican or hyphenated Mexican-American identities regardless of their birthplace. We saw that these Mexican youth have experienced isolation from and rejection by the broader host society, from Anglos, other Hispanics, and even earlier arriving Mexicans. We also saw how so many young people do not want to accept American culture because they believe that accepting American culture means rejecting or betraying their roots and because they do not wish to be included with American culture. We also saw how the church both Catholic and Protestant, provide a social setting that reinforces and supports their Mexican identity.

What does this mean for the rest of us?

What is the importance for the rest of us? Why should we care about Mexican youths in Homestead, Florida? I believe that these young adults can enlighten us on how they form their identities, which will inevitably influence how civically engaged they will become in the future. To me, the most powerful finding of this research is the link between my subjects' rejection by and isolation from the broader society and their reactive ethnicity, their own desires not to be American. I believe the broader society needs to include and welcome immigrants, specifically Mexicans, so they don't feel isolated or rejected.

If these groups remain isolated and segregated from the larger society, their voices will not be heard and they are more likely to suffer from horrible working conditions, poverty, and racism. If they do not have a political voice because they are rejected, then America cannot claim to be an inclusive, multicultural democracy. The very core of our government and society is having the channels accessible to all people in the United States.

The United States was founded on opening their doors for anyone who wants to live in a free and democratic society where they will not be persecuted for their beliefs or race or sex. This country provides the opportunities so many other nations in the world do not. A chance to live a better life is the main reason why so many immigrants arrive everyday, why then should we not try to incorporate them so that we can share their views and attitudes on culture. Together we can learn from one another and benefit socially and culturally.

Religious institutions as studied here are a way for tolerance to be promoted and implemented. If we can have religious groups encourage activism while reinforcing identity and culture the congregation will see that becoming “American” is not necessarily a bad thing. It will help their cause and they do not have to feel that they will be “selling out” or losing their culture but instead enriching their lives because they will have a voice and be heard so they can help their communities.

So many Mexicans live in harsh conditions because of low educational levels, poor socioeconomic statuses and so forth. If the parents do not naturalize or become involved in greater society this cycle of low expectations will be passed on to the children. Second generation children as seen here are susceptible and often have rejected becoming American. This will only create a cycle that harms us all. We need to work on both ends, within the immigrant community but as well with greater America to encourage civic participation for all Americans.

Mexican youths are a growing population that unfortunately has been discriminated and marginalized for decades. There has been legislation and movements to assimilate Mexican immigrants into American society quickly. For example, California’s Proposition 187 intended to abolish social and non-emergency health care services and access to public schools to undocumented students and their children. Proposition 227 intended to terminate bilingual classes and implement English only classes. The end result is reactive ethnicity, a defensive reaction to a negative reception by the host society, the consequence of these policies. As Proposition 187 demonstrated in California, even youths who are Mexican-American and not nationalistic rediscovered their Mexican culture to unite in protest against this unjust policy. Much like in Miami

during the Elían Gonzalez affair where the Cuban community lashed out at the U.S. government for taking Elían back to Cuba, many Cuban Americans were disgusted and angered by this act and went out in the streets to fight with their parents and the Cuban exile community.

There is a cycle of intolerance that keeps hurting those who perpetuate it. The growth in the number of Mexican immigrants coming into this country has alarmed many in the past years, but instead of combating it with harsh laws and policies we have to analyze the problems that exist and are very much present in our own communities. As I discovered when I interviewed Mexican youths on why they identify themselves as Mexican and not Mexican-American or American there was a clear response of “why should we if they do not want us here?” The youths especially are much more in-tune with the American media and the stigmas because they are more involved and active in larger society than their parents might be. They are aware of the negative stereotypes targeted towards them by other Hispanic groups and/or the Anglo population.

In the studies conducted by Thomas Tweed (1997) and Helen Rose Ebaugh (2000) they clearly indicate that religious organizations influence and enhance ethnic identity. Tweed’s research of La Ermita de la Caridad showed how the Cuban exile community was able to recreate a second home where Cuban exiles could worship and satisfy their need for a home in the diaspora. Ebaugh’s et al work on the Houston area of religious groups and immigrant communities characterized what would determine whether or not an immigrant find the support sought at the church. As Ebaugh along with Bankston and Zhou have also found, various immigrant communities will respond positively to a religious center whose mission is to accommodate them, and this will

inevitably promote civic engagement (Bankston III and Zhou 1995; Ebaugh and Chafetz, 2000).

This argument was supported by my research and findings that conclude that St. Ann's and IMP serve as cultural enhancers by providing Spanish-language religious services, celebrating Mexico's patron saint, and festivals, and promoting plays that portray Mexican history in a positive light. Having visitors from Mexico or other Spanish countries and as in IMP the emphasis of traditional gender roles, further enforces ethnic identity. Women's roles that are customary of a Mexican lifestyle and perpetuated by biblical passages as Oscar demonstrated reflect how cultural aspects are perpetuated in these local churches.

The most important factor supporting Mexican identity is that the churches provide an atmosphere where the congregation shares the same dress, music, language and food. The music performed for the services are done in a *ranchero* style. Most of the congregations dress traditionally and communicate with each other with Mexican accents. Moreover, all the youth I interviewed agreed that what makes someone a Mexican was the beliefs, morals, language, food and music.

As I have shown in this thesis, religious institutions can provide the means of engaging youth in larger society. It is imperative that we determine such sources of involving youth with the greater community for the significance of their attitudes and behaviors will have on future generations. As a democratic and free society we should engage everyone in this country to become active in society and exert their right as humans, regardless of whether they are legal or undocumented.

Religious groups are powerful tools that can be helpful to these youth reach the greater community. The fact these youths are active in youth groups and are committed to them demonstrates their dedication to serve their church communities as well as the Mexican community of Homestead. The fellowship of Padre Pedro at St. Ann's is worth noting because of his loyalty to the youth groups. He has been able to cross the generational gap between himself and the youth to become their friend and spiritual advisor. He does not reprimand them but instead gives them constructive criticism when needed and guides them so that they may do a better job. Although, the youth group in itself is motivated enough to lead others and take charge of important events like the Virgin of Guadalupe festivities.

IMP's youth group is not at a disadvantage by not having similar events. They are also devoted to the church and to the people. They may have a different method of helping others but the goal is the same, doing good for your neighbors. By focusing on evangelism they are helping other youngsters become more spiritually oriented which will inevitably lead to living a better life. Someone who is committed to church will mostly likely not be participating in any wrongdoing and may in fact become better citizens.

I believe we should look at religious institutions and cooperate with them if we want to better teach our youth on how to become civically engaged. I don't want to imply that this should be the only means of doing so but it can be one powerful method to get in touch with today youths, specifically immigrant youth, because they are more vulnerable and need the extra support. In the long run it will only benefit all of us if we have young immigrants become more engaged in what our society has to offer by feeling

welcomed and accepted. The key here is balance between both worlds and cultures. It should be a complementary mixture of two lifestyles where they can maximize their potential in the United States by adding the richness of their native lands.

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Appendix 1 – Interview Protocol

Interview protocol-Congregant Interview⁹

Background to Religious Identity:

1. I'd like to begin by asking you some background questions about your church and your relationship with it. Please tell me about how you found your church and how long you have been attending.
 - *Is there anything particular about this church that attracted you to it originally or keeps you coming back?*
 - *What is it about this church/group that keeps you interested, keeps you coming back?*
2. If you were to describe your church and its congregation to a person who had never been to it, what would you tell them?
 - *Is there anything unique about your church or its members?*
 - *(Ask only if need additional info after leader interviews): What do you know about your church's history?*
3. Does your congregation have any:
 - *Specific beliefs about God? If so, please describe.*
 - *A mission or set of aims? (describe)*
 - *Do you share these beliefs and mission? Why or why not?*
4. Have you held any specific positions within your church, I mean everything from being a member of the choir to participating in the church service or taking on leadership roles?
 - *How much would you say women participate in the church and what kinds of activities are they most involved in?*
 - *(If unanswered above): Are there women leaders in your church and if so what do they do?*
5. Of your family and close friends, how many would you say go to your church?
 - *Probe: (If answer not helpful, give categories): none, some, most, all*
 - *Probe: How far do any of you drive to be able to attend your church?*
6. Now I'd like to ask you about your own religious experiences starting with childhood and leading up to the present. Please tell me in what religious tradition you were raised; if you were raised in more than one tradition or church I'd like to know about all of them.
 - *Probe: Did you attend a religious school while growing up? If so, ask why they attended (e.g., if parents pushed) and describe their experiences.*

⁹ Interview protocol taken from the PEW project "Religion, immigration, and Civic Life in Miami".

7. Over the course of people's lives their relationship to their faith or spirituality and their involvement in church can change. Some people refer to this as one's personal 'faith or spiritual journey.' Would you please tell me briefly what your journey has been? What I mean is if you feel that at times you have had more faith or been more involved in church and at other times you have been less faithful or less involved in church.
 - *Probe: If in Q 7 or Q6 they tell about significant changes, ask them to explain the changes – when and why they occurred.*
8. What role or roles would you say that your faith and/or spirituality play in your life?
 - *How do you view the Bible? [probe: story, inspired word of God, etc.]*
 - *What qualities would you say make a person a good Christian?*
9. Lots of people practice their faith not only at church but also in their home or in other places and activities where they feel the presence of God. What about you?

Probe for:

 - *Prayer, home shrines [ask for a home tour if interview in home], (If Catholic): saints, etc.*
 - *Ever attend pilgrimage, feast day celebrations, etc.*
 - *Service to others activities (civic engagement)*
 - *(If suspect Voudou or Santería): African-based faiths, prayer, etc.*
10. My last question in this section is about how you would define being a "good person"?
 - *Now how would you define being a "good _____ (blank is filled in by person's religion)?"*
 - *Are there any specific activities someone should do to be a "good _____"?*
 - *Probe: service to others*

II. Civic Engagement:

1. That last question brings me to the next section of the interview which has to do with your church and your own relationship to the community. Would you say your church serves the greater community's needs and, if so, please describe what it does.
 - *PROBE: for particular substantive areas, e.g., health, hunger, housing, homeless, jobs.*
 - *PROBE: for various kinds: charity, volunteerism, service, outreach, evangelism*
 - *PROBE: for activities that focus on co-ethnics, such as helping new immigrants, disaster relief.*
 - *PROBE: lends/rents space to community organizations*
 - *PROBE: Helps members of the congregation*

2. Why does your church or members of your church get involved with community service activities?
 - *Probes: (1) Because church has this as a mission?*
 - *(2) Because specific individuals are very committed?*
 - *(3) Because specific groups do this kind of work?*
 - *(4) Because church sees this work as "saving souls"?*
3. What community activities have YOU and/or members of your family been involved with over the years?
 - *Use probe list from Q1 above.*
4. Do you feel your church should take a more active role in serving the greater community or concentrate more on its own needs? Why?
5. An issue that has recently surfaced is President Bush's initiative to involve faith-based organizations more in providing social services to communities. How do you feel about this initiative? Do you think your congregation would become involved and if so, how?
 - *PROBE: for what they think the relationship between church and state/government should be.*
 - *PROBE: if the pastor or church or groups of members ever get involved in electoral politics, e.g. providing a forum, commenting on elections, endorsing candidates or initiatives*
 - *PROBE: on whether pastor or church or groups of members ever lobby or preach on moral issues that are also matter of public policy or legislation, such as abortion, prayer in schools.*
6. Why are you and your church (not) involved in these issues?
 - *PROBE for theological justification, e.g. It's scripturally based; It's God's work; God wants us to help our neighbor, be a good Samaritan.*

III. Focus on Youth Issues & Programs

1. In your opinion, what role should a church play in the formation of its youth?
 - a. *Does your church play this role? Why or why not?*
 - b. *What kinds of activities does your church provide for its youth?*
 - *If groups, ask for time/day of meeting, leader(s) and contact phones.*
2. Do you see differences in the attitudes and behaviors of youth between those who are involved in the church and those who are not?
3. Do you see that young people's involvement in your church changes as they go through the life cycle and particularly during adolescence and young adulthood? How so?

- *How about you personally? When you were a teen what was your own relationship to the church, religion and faith?*
 - *Were you involved in any church-sponsored activities to serve the community?*
4. What issues are the youth in your congregation facing and what is your congregation doing about them?
- *PROBE: Problems between youth and their families, peers **intergenerational issues** → see next*
 - *PROBE: dating and going out , sexuality, music, drugs*
 - *PROBE: Intergenerational issues such as language of services*
5. May repeat intergenerational above; if not: Based on your own family's experience and those of other families you know from your church here in Miami, do you think there are differences between the relationships adults have to the church and their faith versus relationships youth have? Please give examples.”
- PROBES:*
- a. *How significant are these differences?*
 - b. *What do people do about them?*
6. Do you feel that youth raised in the United States grow up with similar or different religious values and practices as youth do in your homeland? Explain.
- *Are differences source of conflicts? **Intergenerational again***
 - *Probe person's own experience raising children in U.S. (if applicable).*
7. What do you feel should be the role of Christian youth vis-à-vis serving the community?
- PROBES:*
- *Does your church involve youth in any community service related activities and if so, how?*
 - *When you hear the term “community” how do you define it and how do you think your church's youth define it?*
 - *Does your church have any programs specifically designed to cultivate youth as future leaders?*
- Probes to suggest:*
- *Youth retreats, special trips, leadership/empowerment courses.*
 - *Youth-led worship, youth-led groups in church.*
 - *Youth invited to participate in activities that get them out in the community like literacy or voter registration campaigns.*
8. Does your church run any activities especially for youth? Please describe.
- Probe: Show List of youth activities youth activities and civic outreach Group's info & contacts.*

IV. “Now, I’d like to ask you about life as an immigrant.”

1. Would you consider yourself more or less religious now than how you were in your homeland before you immigrated to the U.S.? Why?
2. What differences do you see between how people you know practice their faith in your homeland and how they practice it here in the U.S.?
3. Do you see differences in the way that churches operate here versus in your homeland?
4. Does your church celebrate in any way the diverse traditions of its congregants or would you say it celebrates more members’ commonalities? Please describe.
 - *Probe ethnic festivals, patron saints days, etc.*
5. Has your church helped you or anyone you know adjust to life in the United States? Please describe.
 - a. *Did you get \$\$, info, referrals, or make friends who helped?*
 - b. *Does the church assist other immigrants? Describe how [probe programs].*
 - c. *What might the church do to assist more?*
 - d. **Voting:** *Has your church ever encouraged you to register to vote or learn more about your rights living in the U.S.?*
 - e. **Voter Registration:** *(If not undocumented): May I ask you if you are currently registered to vote or plan on registering?*
 - *Do you feel that voting is something you should do and why or why not?*

V. Transnational Connections

1. Some people who immigrate still retain contact with their church in their homeland. Is this true in your own case and if so please describe these ties. (Can give a few ideas from Probe List below)
Probe: If individual says no, ask if others in church do or if any friends, family who go to another church do. Ask if OK to contact [get names and phone]

List of types of activities to suggest if unsure what we mean:

- Returning home for first communions/ baptisms/weddings, patron saint or local community festivals, etc.
- Celebrating patron saint festivals for different nationalities through, for example, committees that coordinate some of the work abroad (like getting Nicaraguan foods or items).
- Sending funds to help build or refurbish parishes. Also disaster or general humanitarian aid. This could be by individuals of their own accord or coordinated by a church, diocese, religious associations, etc.

- Visiting priests, missionaries or other parishioners from the home country who come specifically to your parish (or vice versa, people from the U.S. who travel abroad to the countries of origin of parishioners).
- Exchanges organized between churches, dioceses or higher-level organizations in the different countries (such as missions run during the summer, etc.)
- Get together between church groups from different countries (youth retreats, cursillo groups, etc. that might meet in one country one year and in another the next).
- Sending or receiving religious newsletters, updates or other literature.
- Radio/TV programs that are filmed and/or broadcast in other countries. Even videos of religious events that people send home.

Final/Loose Ends “I need to ask you a few last questions about yourself”

1. Would you mind telling me your age and how you identify ethnically?
2. Where were you born and when did you come to the U.S.?
3. What kind of work do you do [include homemaker if appropriate]?
4. What is the highest grade or degree you finished in school?
5. What places have you lived in or visited in the U.S. outside of South Florida?
6. What religion, if any, did your parents practice?
7. Are there any other people from your church you could recommend that I interview: [gather information]
8. You have told me that you are a [FILL IN WITH RELIGIOUS GROUP]. Please tell me what other religious groups you see yours as most similar to and most different from.
9. Finally, I would appreciate it if you would tell me about how you personally felt during the Elian Gonzalez affair.
 - a. Was this similar to or different from others in your church?
 - b. What, if anything, did your church do to address this issue?
 - i. How did you feel about what your church did or did not do?
 - ii. What if any role should the church take in politics?

CLOSING

Thank you very much for your participation in our study. I’m sure your information will be very useful. I would like to assure you that it will be kept confidential if you so desire. Do you prefer that we cite you directly or would you like to have your identity kept anonymous (Indicate by circling: CITE or ANONYMITY). Please do not hesitate to contact me or Dr. Stepick with any questions or further information you might have.

List of Youth Programs/Activities

Following is a list of activities, programs and groups that your organization may have for youth. Please mark those, which you do offer to youth. If applicable, please fill in the blanks as well.

Sunday School

Youth Choir(s). How are they organized? By age, by sex: _____

Youth prayer meetings

Bible/Scripture studies

Youth Retreats or special trips. Describe: _____

Evangelism. To whom? _____

Day Care

Schools: Circle which level (s): Elementary, Middle, High School

Language classes. For what language(s): _____

Cultural Heritage, Cultural Pride events: _____

Manners and Etiquette classes or training

Tutoring. For what subjects? _____

After school activities

If so, what kinds? _____

Counseling Services. For what? _____

Self-Esteem Classes

Sports Programs. For which sports? _____

Sex, Dating and Marriage Education

Job Training

Assistance for immigration-related problems

Community Service, such as helping the elderly, neighborhood clean up

If so, what kinds? _____

Others. Please List: _____