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The Rise of Latino Protestants

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A worship service
at Primitive Christian Church
in New York City.

Associated Press

By Aida Isela Ramos

The Rise of Latino Protestants

By 2030, half of the Latinos in the U.S. will be Protestant.

DURING ONE OF my first visits to a church in San Antonio for the Latino Protestant Congregations Project, the pastor invited a church member to speak about his experience in a federal immigration detention center. An elderly gentleman rose from his seat with a Bible tucked under his arm. For the next hour, this man, a Salvadoran undocumented immigrant, told his story.

He had been handed over to immigration officials after a minor traffic violation and was transferred to one of the largest detainment centers in south Texas. Without being overtly political, he stated matter-of-factly the conditions he endured at the overpopulated detention center, including the loud crying by men in the cells next to him throughout the night. His case for amnesty looked grim. He prepared mentally for deportation to El Salvador, a place he had left to escape violence.

Then he remembered Peter's imprisonment in Acts 12 and decided to start a Bible study for male detainees. He was given

permission to preach twice a day. He said that 150 detainees attended his gatherings and 58 converted to the gospel. On hearing this, the congregation erupted in applause and cheers of "Hallelujah!"

This church had worked tirelessly to get him released. They raised money to pay court fees, hire an attorney, and sup-

**Some prefer not to
label advocacy work
as "political."**

port his spouse. Endless phone calls were made to track down his records in El Salvador. Local leaders vouched for his character. The church's efforts were eventually rewarded with his release. He—and they—understood his release as nothing short of a miracle. This Latino Protestant church provided him a platform to humanize his traumatic experience. While not

intentionally political, his testimony carried political implications.

This is just one example of the many ways Latino Protestant congregations approach political and social engagement.

Beyond immigration, Latino Protestant congregations focus on a wide range of social issues. For example, in Oakland, Calif., churches advocate for affordable housing amid gentrification. In San Jose, congregations work to end gang violence. In San Antonio, they provide college scholarships and fresh produce in poor neighborhoods.

BY 2030, according to researchers, half of the Latinos in the U.S. will be Protestant. Latino Protestant churches are growing and parachurch organizations are expanding. This remarkable growth is not just about numbers, it's about people, and so in 2013, my colleagues and I initiated a multiyear ethnographic study to gather qualitative data on Latino Protestantism.

The political and social actions taken on

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by the congregations we studied are shaped by their contexts. Often, congregations engage with issues they face daily, although some prefer not to label this advocacy work as “political.” Other Latino Protestant congregations completely avoid political hot topics. For example, a Southern Baptist congregation in Texas decided to drop the word “Hispanic” from its name because the term was deemed too political and racially divisive. This change was led by the pastor, who saw “political” issues as a distraction from the church’s mission.

We found that religious traditions and theological orientations played an important role in shaping the type of political and

social engagement churches took up. They were not homogenous in their approach.

Faith-rooted social action will continue to be important in Latino Protestant congregations, particularly in a time of intensified immigration enforcement and continued socioeconomic inequality. Under the Trump administration, it’s likely that some Latino Protestants will gravitate toward stronger political stances and some will seek to eschew them altogether. ■

Aida Isela Ramos is an assistant professor of sociology at George Fox University in Oregon and co-author of Latino Protestants in America: Growing and Diverse.

By Anna Ikeda

A Step Toward a Nuclear-Free World

North Korea reminds us why nuclear weapons must be eliminated.

“THIS WILL BE A historic moment,” announced Ambassador Elayne Whyte Gómez on July 6, the day before 122 countries adopted the U.N. Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons as a legally binding agreement to outlaw nuclear weapons—and a major step toward their complete elimination. (Sixty-nine nations refused to vote, including all the nuclear weapon states and all NATO members except the Netherlands.)

“I have been waiting for this day for seven decades, and I am overjoyed that it has finally arrived,” said Setsuko Thurlow, a renowned antinuclear activist and survivor of the U.S. nuclear weapon dropped on Hiroshima, Japan, in 1945.

Parties to the treaty are prohibited from developing, testing, producing, manufacturing, possessing, or stockpiling nuclear weapons. The treaty also creates, for the first time, obligations to support the victims of nuclear weapons use and testing, as well as remediation of environmental damage caused by nuclear weapons.

Equally as significant is the normative change the treaty brings. It declares the global norm that the use or threat to use

nuclear weapons, under any circumstances, is impermissible, and it delegitimizes their roles in international security. It also reinforces the global legal norm for nuclear weapons abolition, building on past efforts, including those of more than 100 countries that have formed nuclear-weapon-free zones. Furthermore, this new legal norm can be universalized to include current nuclear states that are willing to take significant steps toward disarmament.

Changes once thought impossible have happened throughout history because people acted to shift the norms, not because the dominant stakeholders lost interest. To skeptics—even “progressives” who disagree with nuclear weapons in principle but see no way forward without the participation of nuclear-armed states—I say that there is no need to give those states the power to decide when such weapons will be prohibited or abolished.

The treaty’s preamble stresses “the role of public conscience in the furthering of the principles of humanity as evidenced by the call for the total elimination of nuclear weapons.” As conscious citizens, we must inform our families and communities about the treaty. We must encourage

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