Hispanic Ministry and Social Justice
Arturo Chávez

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“La bendición del Padre, la bendición del Hijo, la bendición del Espíritu Santo…y la mía que te acompañe.” With this blessing, my Abuelita would send me off to journeys near and far. Long after the warmth of her embrace faded, I felt her love and prayers—her acompañamiento—as I faced the joys and pains of my journeys. In her simple way of love, my Grandmother passed on to me a deep faith in the Trinitarian God whose very essence is loving relationship. Similarly, the elders of Hispanic ministry have blessed the Church with a historical memory of our struggles for justice in society and a place of belonging in the Church. This testimonio has been preserved orally and in documents that emerged in the seventies and eighties from the historic Encuentros, culminating in 1987 with the National Pastoral Plan for Hispanic Ministry, unanimously adopted by the USCCB, that calls Catholics to

live and promote... by means of a pastoral de conjunto, a model of Church that is: communitarian, evangelizing, and missionary, incarnate in the reality of the Hispanic people and open to the diversity of cultures, a promoter and example of justice... that develops leadership through integral education... that is leaven for the Kingdom of God in society.

The mission statement for Hispanic ministry, pregnant with theological meaning, inspired years of deep reflection, lively debates, and new scholarly works that gave birth to what we now refer to as Latino/a contextual theology and spirituality. On the whole, the discourse was fruitful not only in the academy but as the rationale for establishing diocesan offices for Hispanic ministry throughout the country and for empowering a new ecclesial leadership—Hispanic Bishops and clerics, religious, and lay ministers. The mission statement also served as the impetus for social action, especially at the parish level, using the principles of Catholic Social Teaching and the organizing tactics and networks of the times. Hispanic ministry, thus, became inseparably linked with social justice and firmly established in many dioceses and parishes.

The trajectory for implementing the Pastoral National Plan consistently throughout the country, however, was unfortunately miscarried. Rather than building a strong, national network, Hispanic ministry splintered into various special interest groups in the 1990’s competing for the same, diminishing resources of a Church facing multiple challenges. Externally, the tragic events of September 11, 2001, the Iraq War, the growing anti-immigrant climate, and the global economic crisis have further hindered the implementation of the National Pastoral Plan for Hispanic Ministry, even after the USCCB reaffirmed it in their 2002 document, Encuentro y Mision. While the pastoral care of Hispanics continues throughout many of our dioceses, the more important but less urgent goals of integral education, leadership formation, social justice, and systemic change have been placed on the back burner. We are left disoriented in both Church and society, even as we refer to
the maps that once guided and inspired our journey. The invaluable *bendiciones* we received from our elders still accompany us, but the path has now become an eight-lane highway, with a myriad of under and over passes, during rush hour! The signs are clearly marked, and now we even have our fancy GPS gadgets and «smart phones» but we are moving too fast and too isolated in our individual vehicles to accurately see the rapidly changing landscape for what it is, and adjust our vision accordingly.

**Without a Vision, the People Perish**

Pope Benedict XVI in his recently released encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* affirms that the whole Church is at a crossroads. The new complexities and challenges of the twenty-first century—culminating in the global economic crisis—are the new «signs of our times» that must be seen through the lens of our fundamental, Catholic values. He calls us to a profound cultural renewal that is fueled by a confident hope and tempered with a «realistic attitude».

His exhortation is especially pertinent to our efforts in Hispanic ministry to promote social justice. Heeding his call, we must «re-plan our journey» as we chart a new course that builds on all the positive experiences and rejects the negative ones that have led us astray. The Holy Father assures us that only then, can the crisis become «an opportunity for discernment, in which to shape a new vision for the future».

A vision for Hispanic ministry in the twenty-first century, must be realistic and still compelling enough to inspire a renewed commitment to *pastoral de conjunto*. This theologically rich term describes not only the mechanics of a collaborative ministry—communication, consensus, shared planning, etc.—but also the spirit of harmony among diverse instruments that complement rather than compete for the sake of the common good. It calls us to pray together and to share our resources. Communion in mission requires a sustained investment of spiritual, financial, institutional, and human resources. This is indeed a challenge when so many diocesan offices for Hispanic ministry are being closed, merged with other ministries, or asked to do more with less.

The demographics are very clear; the future of the Catholic Church in the United States is directly related to how effectively it responds to the spiritual, educational, and social justice issues of Hispanics today. We must therefore be more astute and creative. We cannot do everything; however we must prioritize our agenda and do what is ours to do with such hope that our enthusiasm for the future will contagiously enlist the help of the whole Church and of new *protagonistas*—Hispanic professionals, intellectuals, politicians, business owners, active voters, artists, philanthropists, and especially our youth. They are mostly Catholic but have not been part of our journey to date. Often, they are neglected by or estranged from the Church. Even so, they are seeking spiritual meaning in their lives. They have a passion for social justice, and want to invest in a better future for Hispanics and for the whole country.

**Making the Most of Opportunities**

Setting priorities implies discernment. In our quest for social justice, it is essential to distinguish between a social problem and an issue. While they are certainly interrelated, no progress on addressing poverty, racism, sexism, violence, or other social problems can be accomplished without carefully discerning the interrelated issues they spawn. For example, the persistent problem of poverty among Hispanic children is directly related to the specific issues they face—limited access to quality education, family violence, healthcare, etc. Yet, after a careful discernment of the problems and issues, prioritizing the «win-able» issues in the ever-changing political landscape can be even more challenging. Timing is everything when it comes to politics where there are never
permanent allies or enemies. As Catholics, our principles for social action go beyond politics and particular ideologies; however, our strategies must include working and negotiating with “the powers that be” at any given time, without compromising integrity in both the ends and the means of our action.

Hispanic voters in the last two presidential elections have demonstrated the growing, political power that we have. It is not surprising that President Barack Obama has appointed more Latinos to his administration during his first few months in office than any of his predecessors, including the high profile appointments of Sonia Sotomayor to the Supreme Court, and theologian Miguel H. Díaz as the new U.S. ambassador to the Holy See. What are the opportunities and the challenges of this historic moment? How do we seize the opportunities of our new-found power without compromising our values? For me, personally, this is no longer an abstract debate but a daily examination of conscience. In early February, I was contacted by the Obama administration to gauge my willingness to serve as a member of the White House Advisory Council for Faith Based and Neighborhood Partnerships. After consulting with my own spiritual advisors, I agreed to serve as a way of bringing the concerns and values of the Catholic Church and the critical needs in Hispanic communities to the agenda of the new administration.

Since then, I have been working with 24 other leaders from various religious and cultural backgrounds to advise the White House on the most effective ways for the government to partner with faith communities and nonprofit organizations on the following areas of concern: the economic recovery of our country; effectively responding to the basic human needs of people who are poor especially women and children who are among the most vulnerable in our society; preventing teenage pregnancy and reducing the number of abortions; promoting responsible fatherhood and healthy families; and fostering interfaith dialogue around the world as a means of building global peace and cooperation. This is truly an ambitious agenda, one that we must fully engage with the best of our abilities and resources.

Following the example of our Bishops, we must work with the new administration to enact social policy that is just and responds to the needs of the most vulnerable and frail. We can work together to heal the divisions in our country and our world by finding common ground instead of polarization. Above all, we must stand with our Bishops in defense and support of the life and dignity of every human person «from womb to tomb». They have set a pattern we can follow as they strongly oppose the positions of the Obama administration regarding stem cell research and abortion. At the same time they have affirmed the positions of the administration that are congruent with Catholic Social and Moral Teaching, e.g. forbidding the use of torture, ending the war in Iraq responsibly, caring for the environment, nuclear disarmament, a two state solution in the Holy Land, and many of the initiatives included in the Recovery Act that will directly benefit people who are poor and vulnerable. The USCCB is also actively engaged in upholding our Catholic Social Teaching as the heated debates continue on healthcare and immigration reform. Careful discernment and making the most of the opportunities of these upcoming years are essential if we are to bring the principles of Catholic Social Teaching to the decision-making table.

Ongoing Pastoral Discernment

In Hispanic ministry, the tried and true method of ver, juzgar, and actuar has served to mobilize our people «from pews to shoes», through effective social action guided by the light of the Gospel and our «best kept secret» – the numerous documents, encyclicals, and pastoral letters of the Magisterium on Catholic Social Teachings. Over the decades, we have incorporated the additional steps of celebrating our accomplishments (celebrar) and evaluating their impact (evaluar). The
unique pedagogical approach of *Instituto Fe y Vida* has also introduced the dimension of «*ser*» to the hermeneutical circle to emphasize that education and the call to justice are intrinsic to the nature of the human person.

More recently, the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in America* and Pope Benedict’s statements at the Fifth General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate in Aparecida, Brazil exhort the whole Church to contextualize discernment for social action within the call to discipleship flowing from an encounter with Jesus Christ, the Risen Lord. This leads us to a deeper conversion, a closer communion, and a courageous commitment in solidarity with those who are poor and suffering. The Holy Spirit continues to guide our plans for social action by opening our eyes to see with the eyes of Jesus and to judge these realities with the mind of Christ. This is, of course, nothing new to Hispanic ministry. However, it is possible that our implicit assumption of this essential element for true discernment has opened the door to ideologies and methods of social analysis that are incompatible with the Gospel. The fundamental error of Marxist materialism is only one example and perhaps the easiest to contest. The fatal flaws of capitalism, reductionism, and the relativism of postmodernity are closer to home and therefore more insidious.

The most important reason, however, to begin our analysis of social issues with *creer*, is for the sake of a whole new generation of Latinos who have never received a systematic catechesis in the fundamental tenets of our faith, nor experienced the richness of our Catholic culture. It is incumbent upon us as leaders in Hispanic ministry to explicitly root the communal processes and methods for discerning, planning, and implementing social action in the ontological dignity of the human person (*ser*) and the primordial call to holiness through faith (*creer*). This way we can ensure that the following five phases of pastoral discernment are rooted in an overall understanding and faithfulness to the rich deposit of our apostolic faith:

**Cycle of Pastoral Discernment**

![Cycle of Pastoral Discernment](image)

Along with this familiar method for discernment, we need to be clear on the fundamental principles that should guide the goals and strategies of our social action. The remainder of this essay will outline some of the central themes of Catholic Social Teaching with a few suggestions for action on issues that are central to Hispanic ministry:

**1. The Right to Life**

The foundation of Catholic Social Teaching is a deep, uncompromising respect for life. Pope Benedict makes this point exceedingly clear as he exhorts Catholics to put first things first.\textsuperscript{x} We
cannot plan an agenda for social justice ignoring or having a fragmented knowledge of the Church’s teachings; rather, we begin our discernment and plan our social action from this fundamental truth to ensure we are faithfully guarding the whole of the Church’s seamless teaching on the dignity of human life. This includes the Church’s countercultural teachings on sexuality and the sanctity of marriage as the union between one man and one woman.

There is a major disconnect, however, between the clarity of the Church’s teachings, and the ambiguity of so many Catholics on artificial contraception and abortion. This is a growing issue among Hispanics where cultural attitudes towards sex and gender roles (e.g. machismo) further exasperate the problem. Recent statistics indicate that approximately 53 percent Latinas become pregnant at some point between the ages of 15 and 19, about twice the national average. Over 40 percent of these pregnancies are unintended. The rate of Hispanic women, particularly teens, who have abortions is climbing and they are becoming the most likely to contract sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV. Often, their decisions are severely restricted by abusive spouses and sexual partners with little regard for their dignity and health.

How do we address these complex life-and-death issues in the language of ordinary Hispanics, especially teenagers and pre-teens who are barraged by the media's messages on sex? This is particularly pernicious in the Spanish language media venues such as television, radio, music, and cinema. The reason many «abstinence only» programs are not working is their failure to give teenagers viable and well-communicated alternatives to which they can say yes. How can we develop educational materials that teach the Catholic theology of the body in ways that are accessible to non-theologians? How do we make education on sexuality culturally relevant while still being counter-cultural? How do we work to reduce the number of abortions through political engagement and still be faithful to the Church’s teaching?

2. The Economic System

Social systems are a necessary part of our life together as human beings. Political, economic, educational, and other social systems can bring order and stability to society. However, Catholic Social Teaching reminds us that there are no perfect systems. Christians and people of good will must work together to ensure that systems are just and responsive to the needs of all people without discrimination. The principle of subsidiarity holds that systems should never get too big because this inevitably leads to unresponsiveness to the «lived realities» of people. Human needs are best met through systems at their simplest level.

Utmost in everyone’s mind these days is the current economic downturn. The underlying corruption and blatant manifestation of greed in the global economic system have been revealed. Bishop Michael Pfeifer of San Angelo, Texas aptly put it in a recent article: «It is not just the bank balances that are in the red; it is not just the global economic system that has been rocked; our religious equilibrium and moral direction has also slipped out of control». We are in a state of panic as the temporal sources of our security slip away. Millions have lost their jobs, homes, and savings and, experts warn, this is just the beginning.

How does this affect Hispanic ministry? Undoubtedly, the rate of poverty among Hispanics, already estimated at 23.2 percent, will continue to grow especially among women, children, and the elderly. In December 2009 the U.S. Department of Labor reported that the unemployment rate in the country remained at 10 percent, yet for Hispanics it was 12.9 percent. This obviously does not include the vast number of day laborers and undocumented workers who can no longer find work. With unemployment comes the loss of healthcare benefits and homeownership, a central part of
achieving the «American Dream». 30.7 percent of Hispanics in the United States are uninsured. While national foreclosure statistics are not reported by ethnicity or race, there is ample evidence that Hispanic homeowners have been disproportionately affected by the current wave of foreclosures especially in California, Nevada, and Florida. The Pew Research Center found that nearly one-in-ten (9 percent) Hispanic homeowners say they have missed a mortgage payment in the past year, and 3 percent have received a foreclosure notice. Sadly, more than one-third (36 percent) of Latino homeowners fear they will likely face foreclosure in the next twelve months.

Our agenda for social action in the area of the economic system must answer the poignant questions raised by the U.S. Bishops in their prophetic pastoral letter, *Economic Justice for All*:

> Every perspective on economic life that is human, moral, and Christian must be shaped by three questions: What does the economy do for people? What does it do to people? And how do people participate in it?

These are not easy questions to answer, especially because the economic systems of our times are inseparably joined to other powerful social systems, primarily political, that provide privilege to some groups and individuals while others are disenfranchised.

### 3. Poverty and Education

Although difficult to accurately track, the high school drop out rates among Hispanic youth are consistently higher than their white counterparts, in many states they are twice as high. This has serious implications for higher education. An update to the 2000 U.S. Census reports that only about 13 percent of Hispanics hold a BA degree, compared with 19 percent of African Americans, and 32 percent of whites. Even our Catholic educational system has failed to provide access to quality education to Latinos. Currently only 3 percent of Latino school aged children attend Catholic school in the United States. This is particularly alarming because Latinos are already the majority of U.S. Catholics under the age of 18 and are more likely than their white counterparts to remain Catholic.

Catholic schools serve low income minority students, especially Latinos, far more effectively than comparable public school options. Hispanic students in Catholic high schools are 42 percent more likely to graduate and 2 ½ times more likely to go to college than Hispanic students in public schools. Catholic schools continue to be the most effective means of passing on the faith in the Church in the U.S. as many studies demonstrate. Despite what would seem to be a compelling value proposition for Latino families, the percentage of Hispanic children in Catholic schools is extremely small (3 percent). It is imperative to ask why the number of Hispanic children is no higher in our Catholic Schools. A common argument is that Catholic education is too expensive for Latino families who are disproportionately represented among the working poor and cannot afford it. However, research seems to indicate that money is not the only barrier. So we must ask: what are the systemic barriers and cultural mindsets that keep Latino children underrepresented in our Catholic Schools?

The 2009 report from The Notre Dame Task Force on the Participation of Latino Children and Families in Catholic Schools proposes a national strategy to encourage participation and ownership of Catholic schools among Latinos/as nationwide. The report is an invitation to make Catholic schools more welcoming and accessible to Hispanic children and families and to improve their capacity to effectively serve Latino/a children. The Task Force has set the ambitious but realistic
goal of doubling the percentage of Hispanic children enrolled in Catholic schools by 2020. In light of projected population growth, this will mean bringing the number of Hispanic children in Catholic schools from 290,000 today to over 1,000,000 by 2020. Leaders involved in Hispanic ministry must prioritize this issue in our social justice agenda. This will truly make a profound impact on the Hispanic community in the United States.

4. Option for the Poor: Charity and Justice

The preferential option for people who are poor is one of the cornerstones of Catholic Social Teaching and is central to Hispanic ministry. The strength of a society is measured by how it treats its most vulnerable members. The Church’s option for the poor is not meant to create a division between social classes; rather, it is based on the scriptural mandate to always ask how social policies and practices affect the poorest of God’s children. Everyone is precious to God and deserves a just share of this world’s goods. The Church’s preferential option for the poor goes beyond national borders and calls for global solidarity to end hunger and poverty throughout the world caused by misuse of the earth’s natural resources and irresponsible development.

What does this option mean today as the number of people living in poverty dramatically increases in this country and around the world? Certainly, it means an even greater generosity in charitable giving and increasing Catholic charitable services and relief efforts. This includes strengthening and expanding safety nets for people who are poor to provide services such as: transitional housing for the increasing number of homeless people, expanding healthcare coverage for children, providing for the basic nutritional needs of families through school based programs, and other direct service programs and resources that can be delivered to people in need at the most effective level: person to person, one family at a time, one child at a time.

Catholic Social Thought clearly teaches that we must also strive to discern the root causes of poverty and courageously work for systemic change on behalf of and alongside people who are poor. Given the present realities resulting from the collapse of the economic system, our agenda for social action and advocacy must include innovative approaches to address the root causes of poverty, especially in understanding the relationship between formal education and equitable economic opportunity. This agenda must include: reinvestment in our inner cities through an increase for community development funds, fiscal integrity at all levels of government and public corporations, access to financing and homeownership, access to early and ongoing education, especially bi-literate programs, and, ideally, Catholic education that is affordable for poor families. This can happen with initiatives such as the passage of voucher programs that give parents viable choices for their children’s education. Accessible and affordable college education must also be considered a basic right for all people in today’s competitive job market. Effective job training programs and childcare for single parents must be part of the equation for success, especially among Hispanics.

5. Immigration, Racism, and Workers’ Rights

The Catholic Church has a long tradition of upholding the fundamental right to meaningful labor in conditions that are safe and respect human dignity. Workers have the right to fair wages and to organize unions. In general, the Church upholds the rights of individuals to hold private property and to exercise economic initiative. These rights however must be balanced with a proper understanding of principles related to justice, the common good, and the careful stewardship of God’s creation. Economic systems exist to serve people, not the other way around. These teachings are important for Hispanic workers in the United States, particularly when most are employed as
«blue collar» and service industry workers. Just labors laws and the right to unionize are essential for these workers.

For Hispanics, issues related to workers’ rights are significantly linked to immigration policies. Sadly many of these policies reflect that intrinsic evils such as racism still persist in the social fabric of the United States and that of the Latin American countries where the majority of immigrant workers originate. Despite the fact that migration is primarily fueled by economic forces, governments have consistently refused to address this issue with any substance in negotiating treaties and agreements for trade and investment like the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The pacts, for the most part, only open the doors for the unrestricted movement of capital, materials, and products beyond national borders. Multinational corporations now yield more political power than Nation States and are constantly reinventing themselves through subsidiary entities in countries where people are desperately poor and willing to work for pittance. They operate above the laws of the state, weakening not only its political power but eventually eroding all aspects of its civil society. This is the new colonialism that continues to rob developing countries of their raw materials and their brightest and most determined citizens. This «New World Order», recently called into question by Pope Benedict XVI, imposes legally binding pacts among powerless nations to ensure the free movement of capital and products and at the same time restricting the movement of laborers from these impoverished countries. When money and things have more rights than human beings, we can truly say, «this is not Catholic!»

These free trade agreements, corporate tax breaks, and economic policies have generated great wealth for less than a fourth of the world’s population. For the other three-fourths of the world, however, the unrestricted economic rights of corporations and the severely restricted economic rights of workers have triggered compulsory mass migrations. For every person who benefits from the present economic and political order, thousands upon thousands are forced to choose between poverty in their homelands or the possibility of a better life for themselves and their families elsewhere. Migration is a fundamental right and Catholic Social Teaching affirms it.

By means of their recent joint pastoral letter, Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope and the Justice for Immigrants Campaign, the U.S. Catholic Bishops have sought to courageously uphold the basic human rights of migrants and called on Catholics to actively welcome the «stranger in our midst» and also to push for comprehensive immigration reform. More recently, the Bishops have offered practical policy solutions to the Obama administration proposing compelling moral arguments for bringing the estimated 12 million undocumented immigrants in the United States out of the shadows. Hispanic and non-Hispanic Bishops together are lobbying Congress to fix our broken immigration system and denounce the rising tide of dehumanizing rhetoric that demonizes immigrants as «aliens». The Catholic vision for a humane immigration reform system is not only rooted in appeals to justice and morality, practical arguments are also critical. During the last two decades the federal government has allocated about 10 billion dollars to reinforce security along the U.S.-Mexican border. Migrants have responded by finding new and more dangerous routes into the U.S. There is no wall high enough to deter the dreams of those seeking a better life.

Stopping migration’s socioeconomic engine and the negative consequences for the real people whose lives are negatively affected by imperfect policies requires more than tough talk from finger-wagging politicians or the cowboy antics of local sheriffs. It requires a systematic response that rejects false choices. We can protect our borders and uphold human dignity. Comprehensive immigration reform would include an earned path to citizenship, appropriate worker protections, and policies that keep families from being separated. This is not amnesty or a handout. It’s a
sensible solution to a system where employers and U.S consumers benefit from the labor of undocumented workers and millions of immigrants in general have no protection from exploitation. The failure of Congress to pass reform legislation has forced states to enact a hodgepodge of punitive local ordinances. The National Council of La Raza and the Urban Institute report that two-thirds of children separated from their parents during immigration raids are U.S. citizens. This is shameful. If we hope to move beyond simplistic solutions and the hateful rhetoric that define our polarized immigration debate, we need deeper conversations and bold Hispanic leadership in both Church and society.

We in Hispanic ministry must support our Bishops in continuing to lift their voices and advocate on this critical issue. We have an opportunity, perhaps sooner than we thought possible, to be instrumental in enacting laws that can begin to reform the racist and broken immigration system. As bridge-builders, an even more important role will be to find ways to «reframe» the heated discourse on immigration reform in our country: from debate to dialogue; from problem to opportunity; from symptoms to causes; and from unilateral action to innovative, multinational collaboration. We cannot do this alone or only at the parish level; we must breathe new life into our national and international networks. Migration is a global phenomenon that calls for global solidarity. Cardinal Óscar Andrés Rodríguez Madariaga of Honduras reminds us: «the first way to globalize solidarity is to globalize respect for life...every life».

At a minimum, the leadership in Hispanic ministry must work together to advocate for the following:

- Provisions to ensure that recently arrived immigrants become integrated, educated, healthy and law abiding residents who are licensed to drive, insured as motorists, with good access to credit, banking, and education;
- Improved border management to protect people most affected by the violence and drug trafficking along the border instead of building costly and ineffective walls;
- Bilateral cooperation on economic, labor, health, education, social, environment and infrastructure issues;
- A temporary workers’ program that is focused on and monitored by workers, employers, and independent human rights organizations or NGO’s;
- A reasonable path to earned citizenship for those immigrants who want to become part of the U.S. society;
- Protection and assistance for the most vulnerable –women, children, elderly, and those who are sick or physically handicapped; and,
- Laws and policies that strengthen and reunite immigrant families.

Finally, we must also work together to make college possible for young Latino immigrants who, through no fault of their own, lack the proper documentation to access higher education. This is the time when legislation like the DREAM Act can become a reality.

Conclusion

This essay, a work in progress, calls for a unified effort by the leaders in Hispanic ministry to develop a compelling vision for how we can collaboratively meet the critical signs of our times with creative innovation and by partnering with new protagonists in the struggle for justice. It has offered suggestions for enhancing the pastoral discernment method of ver, juzgar, and actuar with an emphasis on creer. Most urgently, it has identified key social justice agenda items for a unified, national plan of action that upholds the whole range of life issues. These include responsible
sexuality and affirming the sacredness of marriage and family; economic justice that flows for a preferential option for people who are poor, equitable access to education, especially Catholic education, and a summary of what comprehensive immigration reform should include to truly benefit Hispanic workers. Most importantly, this essay is a call to all leaders in Hispanic ministry to renew our commitment to be instruments of peace.

We have experienced the good news of the Gospel and have preserved las bendiciones of our elders in Hispanic ministry. Through their struggles for justice in society and a place of belonging in the Church, we believe that we have a unique gift of leadership to offer the whole world community, especially the poor and suffering. We rejoice in our culture and in our Catholic faith that was first proclaimed in this hemisphere by our ancestors. We seek to share this faith by responding generously to the call for a New Evangelization directed especially to people who are dispossessed, uneducated, sick and suffering, and all those who yearn to know Jesus. In our national networks we have pledged to grow in faith and knowledge. We are working to breathe new life into these necessary national organizations through a communal plan of action propelled by a vision that is becoming clearer each time we gather to listen and speak as the Holy Spirit guides. We accompany each other as we learn to trust again, as we risk again, as we boldly envision new dreams for our world today and confidently claim the promise of our loving God: «For I know well the plans I have in mind for you... to give you a future full of hope» (Jer 29:11).

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3 Many of the pioneers of Hispanic Ministry had also been actively involved in the struggles for civil rights, the «Better World Movement», labor organizing, immigration reform, and the Sanctuary Movement.
5 BENEDICT XVI, Caritas in Veritate 21.
6 Ibid., original italics.
8 In a November 4, 2008 congratulatory letter to then President-elect Obama, Cardinal Francis George of Chicago, president of the USCCB, offers the Bishops’ support and prayers while still challenging him to uphold the central tenet of Catholic Social Teaching, the defense and support of the life and dignity of every human person. More
recently, on September 17, 2009 Archbishop José Gómez of San Antonio led a delegation of Hispanic Bishops to meet with democratic and republican legislators on four areas of deep concern: a broken immigration policy, lack of access to quality education, adequate medical care and economic opportunities. See www.usccb.org for more timely information on the Bishops stances on a variety of social issues.

NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS, National Pastoral Plan for Hispanic Ministry, dimension C, 79.


Caritatis in Veritate 67.


See JOHN PAUL II, Evangelium Vitae 73.


See Ken Johnson-Mondragon’s essay on Hispanic Ministry, Youth and Young Adult Ministry in this book.

Cf. THE NOTRE DAME TASK FORCE ON THE PARTICIPATION OF LATINO CHILDREN AND FAMILIES IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS, To Nurture the Soul of a Nation.

Ibid.

Ibid.

LEO XIII, Rerum Novarum 49.

Caritatis in Veritate 32-33.


http://www.justiceforimmigrants.org/