

Tufts University

Urban Borderlands Fall 2004

Religion & Community among Somerville Latinos

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Cover Sheet

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I. Acknowledgments

As with any work in anthropology, many people gave their time, effort, and wisdom for this project to be possible. Professor Deborah Pacini taught this Urban Borderlands class at Tufts University, for the third year of running it. Without Professor Pacini's knowledge and guidance, I would not have been able to have the opportunity to take on a project like this one. Another organizer for this course was Nelson Salazar at the Welcome Project. His work created the relationship that began our high school student partnerships that proved to be invaluable resources. I would like to thank my high school partner, Vicente for giving his time for a second year in a row on this research. All of the high school kids from Somerville were genuinely enthusiastic about these projects and I wish we only had another semester to work more with them. During our class time we had a speaker come in each week to give our high school partners and us another perspective on the Latino population. Marty Martinez came and gave us an interesting narrative of his experiences running for the Board of Alderman in Somerville and his work afterwards. Elena Letona, the Director of Centro Presente took her time to tell us about the history of her community organization and some significant history of Somerville and Latinos. I would like to thank all of our speakers for enlightening us on issues for our research. A key informant in this project is Father David O'Leary who took his time to enlighten me on the world of Christian religions, which proved to be vital understanding for my research. I would also like to include an acknowledgment of the help and support provided by my classmates. Throughout the semester, we leaned on each other for information and helped each other find contacts for interviews. My project would not nearly have the depth and range it does if it were not for their assistance.

The people who should be given the real credit for this project are the ones who supplied the content of this oral history. Through my excursions in Somerville I have been provided with great background and perspectives on the role of churches for the Latino population in Somerville. Ralph Hergert is a Pastor and has worked for many years in politics. He is on the board for the Community Action Agency of Somerville (CAAS), where I was told about him. I thank Mr. Hergert for taking his time and giving me some valuable perspective on the evolution of the Somerville community. My thanks also go out to Jose Giron and Colixto Lopez. Both are Pastors at a Pentecostal church for El Salvadorans in Somerville. Not only did they take time out of their busy lives to do an interview with me, they also invited me into their church and welcomed me as one of their own. I attended services at their church, Mission de Restauracion de Elim.

Luis Morales narrated the interview I ended up transcribing. Mr. Morales shared with me how he came about starting his own church while running his four local businesses. I thank Mr. Morales for his hard work and his dedication to the Latino population. Another person who has spent many years dedicating her work to the Latino population in Somerville is Daisy Gomez. Mrs. Gomez has been working with the Catholic Church at St. Benedict's since she moved her work from Dorchester to Somerville so she could continue working with a Latino group. Mrs. Gomez did more than one interview for this class, and took quite a few trips to meet with us. I am grateful for her generosity and selfless dedication to the Church community. My final interview was with Roberto Velasquez Sr., who is a parishioner at St. Benedict's, his wife and he has taught Sunday school there for many years, and he is the father of one of the high school partners. I am thankful for his interview because I have been trying to find as

much information on how religion is incorporated into life in El Salvador that might not happen here. Mr. Velasquez gave me a rich history of his hometown of San Miguel and the Patron Saint festivities they have there.

II. Introduction

The Latino community in Somerville is a diverse and richly cultured population. Professor Deborah Pacini for the Urban Borderlands, Anthropology class, arranged this oral history project. In conjunction with the Nelson Salazar at the Welcome Project, Tufts University students were paired up with Latino students from Somerville high school to research a certain topic around Latinos in Somerville. My partner, Vicente Cruz, worked with me to investigate the general theme of religion amongst Latinos. I did not begin with any specific hypothesis, only with the plan to contact local churches and get some different perspectives. Through gathering information, I have heard various points of view, each with its own valuable contributions.

Luis Morales explained to me that the term Latinos could be confusing, because each region and country in Latin and South America have their own culture and traditions. I would approximate that 95% of the Latinos I met through churches in Somerville were El Salvadoran. This culture has such rich and vibrant traditions that it is impossible to miss it at any church where you find El Salvadorans. Chapter 4 of this report is based on life in El Salvador, the different religious traditions practiced there, and how those traditions have been preserved. El Salvador has many traditions connected to religion. Their Patron Saint celebrations are some of the most notable. Included in this

report are accounts of la fiesta de “La Virgen de La Paz” in San Miguel, as well as Carnival de San Miguel, which has an interesting history of its origins.

This report has been broken down into three main sections. Each section has a sub-section for each of the three churches I researched. Chapter 5 covers some general history of how these churches formed. Three Irish nuns opened St. Benedict’s in 1819. St. Benedict’s was the only one of these churches that is older than a decade. Since all Catholic churches are directly connected together through central leadership, it is interesting to see how it reacted and changed with the rise of immigrants compared with modern Catholicism. I try to take this approach when looking at the history of St. Benedict’s as it has been passed on to me. With the Pentecostal church, Mission Christiana de Restuaracion de Elim, their history began in 1999 in the basement of Jose Giron’s house. They are part of a massive church based in El Salvador that has been said to be the second biggest evangelical church in the world. This section covers how this group formed and grew into the parish they are now. Vida Real is the third church where I examine its unique beginning. My only source of information on this church comes from Mr. Morales, though it is an interesting piece in the context of evangelical churches.

Each of these histories tells a fascinating story about how religion relates to community and how it addresses community needs. In this time of a revitalization movement, we get a few examples of just how churches are formed on a grassroots level. Once a church gets going it can rely on its parishioners for support, and the amount of support given varies because of a number of factors. Until that time a church is built on networking and whatever strategies that are available.

Chapter 6 provides some background on ways these churches have gotten involved in the community by creating programs or drives outside of regular church services that address community needs. Whereas in much of this report I am contrasting the Catholic Church and evangelical churches, all of these groups have organized various programs that address issues outside of religion specifically. St. Benedict's has organized a huge group for their CCD classes on Sundays. Much of this organizing is the result of a few tireless people creating the opportunity for community collaboration. Mission de Elim is a relatively new church, but their methods are representative of this sort of community organizing. Pastor Jose Giron told me about the diverse ways in which they go out and try to connect with the community from working with gangs to traveling to houses in order to pray for ill individuals. I found these cultural approaches to various community problems fascinating. Vida Real is a very young church; it opened only 14 months before I interviewed Mr. Morales in November. However, he has already implemented some programs for his parishioners. He told me about a leadership group that meets once a week to discuss ways for them to take their own lead in recruiting members and going out into the community. Interestingly enough, both his church and the Pentecostal group have taken steps to address the new gang problem in Somerville. The issues around gangs in Somerville is complicated, but to get a more in-depth examination of the problem and other human rights issues in Somerville, see Adrienne and Lindsey's project at (insert web address).

In chapter 7 I explain the format of religious services and ceremonies provided by these churches. I had the opportunity to attend services and Mass at Mission de Elim a couple times and a couple times at St. Benedict's as well. These proved to be valuable

experiences in the form of participatory observation. I was also able to get some information from Mr. Morales on the rituals and practices that are incorporated into services at his church. The fact that El Salvadorans are now the predominant group at St. Benedict's, the Spanish Mass is full of El Salvadoran culture. Likewise, Mission de Elim had all sorts of EL Salvadoran traditions worked into their services. One of the most significant aspects of this culture reflected in religious ceremonies is the music. No matter whom I spoke to, they recognized the importance of music to El Salvadorans and the significance of using it in their religion.

The chapter (#8) on recruitment and sustainability lays out the information I learned about how evangelical churches and the Catholic Church provide outreach into the community to get more people to come. I have included much of my analysis about how these individual examples relate to broader issues of the Latin American Diaspora, how immigrants have turned to religion in a different culture, and how different religious groups have adapted to compensate for changing times. The final two sections following this chapter are on some general conclusions and summary, as well as some of my own personal reflections on the project and the implications of my arguments.

III. Methodology

I had only brief introductions to the city of Somerville before I did this project. Today I can drive around the city and feel a familiarity with many areas. More importantly, I had the opportunity to meet involved community members and hear about their experiences. When the Urban Borderlands class began I was not sure about how to choose a good topic. Professor Pacini suggested a project based on the work done with

churches around Latinos in Somerville. Knowing I didn't have much of a network to use in Somerville, I thought that churches would be easy to locate. They are also interesting forms of community gathering. Outside of work, school and family, church is one of the few ways people will come together on a regular basis. For these reasons I began my research.

Something I will have to mention now, and somewhat as a disclaimer, is that before this project I was almost fully ignorant about everything I studied. I have read about conflicts in South America and the resulting immigration, but I had no formal (or even much informal) contact or understanding of the world of religion. This starting point made beginning this project a challenge. I had the pleasure of sitting down with Father David O'Leary one day, to get a micro version of comparative religion 101. He also gave me important background on the formal aspects of the Catholic service. This base provided me with the basic knowledge needed to differentiate between the different forms of Christianity I explored.

My first interview came out of my inquiries at the organization where I am working, the Community Action Agency of Somerville (CAAS). The Director gave me the name of a board member who is also a Pastor in Somerville. Ralph Hergert met with me at his church in East Somerville and gave me some background on the Somerville community and how it has dealt with the immigration of the Latino population. I found out important information and an interesting outsiders perspective on the Latino population, though I still had no other avenues to pursue for interviews.

On one of my trips into Somerville I stumbled upon a church that had a sign out front in Spanish of the schedule of services. I called the phone number on the sign and

asked if I could stop by to speak to someone. They told me to stop by whenever they had services so I came to a Tuesday night service. I showed up and after only a few moments of explaining to a group at the door who I was and why I was there a little boy said welcome to our church and then took me around to speak with people. I sat through the entire service with him translating parts of it for me and at the end I spoke with Pastor Jose Giron and set up a time to interview him.

Throughout this time I had assumed that the Catholic Churches would be the places to go to find Latinos, and through asking a few people I found out about St. Benedict's. I had considered doing the entire project on just St. Benedict's but I soon found the value in covering other groups as well. I stopped by the Church, located off of Broadway on Franklin St, a few times to poke my head in. I found a newsletter and called up the CCD director for Spanish classes, Daisy Gomez. I ended up convincing Mrs. Gomez to do an interview with me and share her unique knowledge, but it had to be approved by the parish's priest first. Visiting St. Benedict's numerous times gave me a much better sense for the church than I would have through only second-hand knowledge passed on through interviews. One Sunday morning I arrived late to Mass and since the entire church was filled, I stood in the back. To my surprise a man who was passing out the collection baskets gave one to me. I then had my first introduction to Catholic ritual when I approached the front with my fellow donation collector to pay our respects, and then we went down the aisle. It was a cool experience getting right involved in the service. I also was able to observe the generous amounts these mostly working-class families give to support the church. At the end of Mass I had a friend who teaches ESL classes at St. Benedict's introduce me to another parishioner and teacher of a CCD class,

Douglas Escabir. Douglas invited me to a Friday night gathering for Latino youth in the basement of St. Benedict's. This was another great opportunity for participant observation as I joined the prayer session. The group was being led by Juan Tejada, who shared some of his thoughts on the church and its involvement with the Latino community. Mr. Tejada played many prayer songs on his guitar during the meeting. He also shared with me some of the reasons music is so important for their culture when it comes to religion.

My strategy after this point was to continue working with these two churches and see whom else I could get in touch with. Other places I looked to for information was my classmates. I had heard Elena Letona tell us about an El Salvadoran in Somerville who owned a few businesses and had started his own church. Dalia's project was based around churches so she was able to track down Luis "Tony" Morales (note: Mr. Morales goes by the name Tony but I was introduced to him as Luis Morales so that is how he is referred to in this report.) I contacted Mr. Morales and he was happy to meet with me about his church. Getting a second perspective (after Jose Giron) from a founder of an evangelical group was extremely valuable in expanding my knowledge on specifically what's involved and the different reasons for feeling a need to take on such a task.

Through visiting St. Benedict's and Mission de Elim a few more time I was given the opportunity to interview the El Salvadoran Pastor brought over to the Pentecostal church, Colixto Lopez. Mr. Lopez was gracious enough to do an interview with me even though my Spanish is laughable and his English is probably somewhere on a similar level at this point. The problem of language was a constant one and I am sure it kept me from getting as much as I could from my experiences. However, there are ways to get by, such

as when I interviewed Mr. Lopez his daughter was there to help translate parts of it, and when writing up the interview I had a roommate who is fluent listen and relay to me what exactly was said.

There are many difficulties and challenges that will occur over the course of doing oral history. Making sure equipment is working is probably one of the things we were warned most about before going out, but problems still arose of recording malfunctions. A piece of advice to keep in mind is that transportation is crucial for doing this project. The public transit system is pretty good but having access to a car is a huge plus for getting around and doing research.

The last part of my method that I would have spent more time on had there been more time was on parishioners. It is one thing to get a Pastor's perspective, but a parishioner can provide an outlook that others cannot. I did have one chance at doing this with Roberto Velasquez. He gave me more of a personal account of his experiences with religion both in El Salvador and in Somerville. I also felt that this interview had more of an informal tone probably because Mr. Velasquez was not representing an organization, as is someone who works for the Church.

I could only start focusing my analysis and start forming a thesis once much of the investigation had finished. My overall strategy then, was to make sure I got all kinds of different perspectives that could enrich and give some depth to my research. It is important to get out into the community and experience whatever subject is being studied in order to do anthropological research. If it were not for the varied perspectives and participatory observation I did, this project would not express the understanding it does.

IV. Religion in El Salvador

There are many religious traditions that come out of El Salvadoran culture. Many celebrations like the ones for the patron saints are interconnected with religion, so part of my project was to see how these traditions have been brought to the States. Roberto Velasquez told me about some of the important traditions he experienced growing up in San Miguel. HE told me about La Virgen de La Paz. This is a celebration that comes out of the town of San Miguel. The story behind the celebration is connected to the volcano near San Miguel. The way it goes is that La Virgen de La Paz (which is a symbol recognized all over El Salvador) sat on some sort of platform or “caja” in the way of the lava, and the lava flow was stopped from destroying the town. As homage to this Saint, on the 21st of November the people of San Miguel put on a large procession through the town. They walk around with the decorated Virgen to the place it is supposed to be placed. The procession is enormous and goes through many of San Miguel’s main streets. Elaborate dances are put on with costumes and singing in honor of the Saint. A couple of years ago this celebration was done in a church in Cambridge that Mr. Velasquez went to, though it was obviously on a much smaller scale. Often the problem with bringing these traditions over is that there are only so many people from each town in a place like Somerville, and different regions have different traditions.

One tradition that is recognized across El Salvador is Carnival de San Miguel. Mr. Velasquez gave me some fascinating background on the origins of this celebration. Carnival comes from ancient Greek festivals in honor of Dionysus, the God of wine. It has almost always had connections to masquerading and is supposed to represent a temporary switch of social roles. In Brazil, where Carnival is best identified, the

celebration preceding lent is not just about indulgence, it is about expressing social discontent through artistic expression.

The story of how Carnival reached San Miguel goes that the Governor of San Miguel one day was in Brazil and saw their Carnival celebration. He then decided to pay with his own money to start Carnival in San Miguel. This was meant to be a gift to the many poor of San Miguel so for at least a few days out of the year they could experience the role of the privileged. After hearing about Carnival in San Miguel, people all over El Salvador traveled to Carnival in San Miguel, each year getting bigger and bigger. People will travel back home especially at that time of year. Mr. Velasquez noted the importance of this celebration for the people of San Miguel, “Every city, every country got many, many problems,” said Mr. Velasquez. He talked about the significance of this celebration and how the cities that don’t have it are still waiting for it. One of the first songs send the message that it doesn’t matter who you are, rich or poor, fat or slim, because everyone is equal during Carnival.

One of the reasons Carnival is valued so much is because El Salvador, like many Central American countries have intense poverty that includes about half of the country. Mr. Velasquez connected the attitudes and behaviors of governments to the need for things like Carnival, “the government doesn’t hear what the people need, they know what they need but they don’t give it.” After spending years in a country in the midst of a bloody civil war run much by an oppressive government to coming to the United States and having to deal with issues around immigration, it is apparent that Mr. Velasquez has some legitimate claims against any state government’s treatment of the impoverished and lower classes. This is why during Carnival people will wear masks of the President or in

other ways reenact the conflicts between rich and poor in their own El Salvadoran style. One of the ways Mr. Velasquez is able to keep up to date on traditions from home is through El Salvador's main newspaper online at www.laprensagrafica.com. The Internet has been an important tool for many immigrants as an accessible way to learn about what is going on in their home countries.

In each of my interviews I had with El Salvadorans, I asked them about their experiences with religion back home. Mr. Morales spoke about his experiences with the Catholic Church connected to the civil war that occurred in El Salvador (1979-1992). I include this passage of our transcribed interview to show a powerful way religion has affected people on extraordinary personal levels as well as its worldly influence:

SH: Would you tell me a little bit about your experiences with religion in El Salvador?

LM: Actually my only experience with religion in El Salvador was that I was very involved with the Catholic Church. I used to work a lot with the nuns and I used to help them run a program that they had over there that, what was his name, Kennedy started in Latin America called Alliance for Progress, or something like that, that they would send wheat, they would send oil and would give that oil or wheat and other things to the poor, to the needy. I worked with them for a couple of years doing that. I was very involved with the church but I was kind of disappointed. I was in a very deep search for God and all of a sudden the spiritual leaders I had, which were the nuns and the priests, got involved in communism. They were running a group of peasants that would come from the country to this small town every Saturday and they were holding meetings. Then on a Saturday they came and I wanted to join one of the meetings and they refused to let me in and they said it was only for people over 18 and I was only like 14 at the time. So that time in the middle of the week the army came and killed almost all the members of the club, sort of, and that's when I found out that the nuns were teaching them how to fight against the government. In a way it was kind of like a brainwash to convince them that the government was wrong and that they need to act against the government. So they were all killed, at least most of them. That shook me because I thought I was on the right path, that I was on a search for God and then I started facing things I didn't plan on facing. So I moved to this other place, Metapan.

In the little town where I was born there was only the Catholic Church. That's it. When I moved to the other cities, there're like 35 different churches. That was my first exposure to different faiths – Seventh Day, Catholics, Assemblies of God, Church of God, Mormons, Gnostics and a bunch of them. So I started trying different religions because I gave up on the Catholic Church and I was kind of hustled because every church they were saying different things but finally I went to like a Baptist church. Central American Missions is what they're called. It's more like a Baptist church. I came to know Jesus at that church and I had a very wonderful experience but I was only in that church for 3 months. Then I was forced to leave the country and I came here.

When I came here I couldn't find a church that would, you know, suit my needs and so I wasn't in church for a while. It wasn't until 1989 that I found an Assemblies of God church and I started going there. And since then I've been part of that church. Right now we have our own mission. I left the Assemblies of God and we started our own mission. I decided to go into theology school. I was exposed to mega-churches and that caught my attention and it brought me to a point where I discovered that churches need to do something because the way they're going I don't think they're going to get anywhere because they're old-fashioned. They are stuck to the same strategies, they don't want to change and I think we're in a different world now. We're in a very aggressive world, which the evolution of this world is so fast and the church has to keep up with change. New ideas are emerging, new ways of doing things, technology. And church is church. No matter where you go, it's always the same. I think that my experience with mega-churches is that they take advantage of everything - take advantage of change, take advantage of technology, take advantage of radios, internet, TV and satellites – they do everything. That has been my goal now, to build up the church that will be different, that will cater to the youth that will cater to a new group of people. I believe that God has a purpose with every parishioner and the purpose is not to sit on a bench, but to do something. God created you because he has a purpose for you and nobody else will take care of that purpose but you. You are in touch with people I will not be in touch with so that's your niche. That's where you should be helping God and the traditional concept of church is that you come to church, you listen to the sermon and then you go home and that's it. I think that God invited us to become part of his kingdom but we got to make a difference. The kingdom of God is the largest kingdom in the world and it's not well represented.

Mr. Morales has four masters, divinity, theology, mental health, and psychology, as well as running four businesses. He has started one church here in Somerville, one in El Salvador and is trying to start another there. To say the least, he is driven. Mr. Morales has ambitious goals but he has proved that he can manage ambitious feats. His vision is clear and he is able to articulate it as a Pastor can do (and I felt that for his

English.) Behind this vision are clear strategies that are used by many evangelical groups, all with their own variations. Mr. Morales is also very much aware of the rising evangelical movement in El Salvador that is growing at substantial rates. Right now the country is approximately (there are all kinds of numbers) 55% Catholic right now. This has been a radical change from a country that was made up of quite a strong majority of Catholics. “In Latin America Christianity it’s not like it is in this country. It’s dying. There it’s growing. It used to be that the United States was the country that would send missionaries all over the world. Now Latin America is doing that.” This is an interesting observation about the changing face of religion in Latin America and their transnational outlook.

El Salvadorans have a vibrant and rich cultural history that is deeply intertwined with religion. Each city has their own Patron Saint celebration and El Salvador has their own Patron Saint, El Salvador del Mundo. This Saint is celebrated all over the country on August 6, every year. The Virgen de Guadalupe, the Patron Saint of Latin America is celebrated on December 26th. These celebrations and fiestas like Carnival de San Miguel carry deeply meaningful cultural expressions and are part of a history of tradition. It is also clear that the violence that continued throughout the 1980s has created profound and dramatic cultural change. What is being played out right now is a disrupted culture coming back together with changed identities and views for the future.

V. The three churches studied (background and history)

A. Catholic Church: St. Benedict's

The Vatican II was called in 1962 and the decrees were released in 1965. The purpose of this assembly was multifaceted, but generally it could be described as an updating of the churches image in order to better relate to communities around the world. I have attempted to read the actual text of the documents but I don't have the time needed to go through them, so I have relied on interpretations to get an understanding of it. Daisy Gomez explained to me what has changed, "Some important changes made were the language switch from Latin to modern languages. The differences Mrs. Gomez noted were that the priest now faced the parishioners, rather than face the altar the entire time, and that parishioners were no longer quiet throughout the service. Mrs. Gomez is correct to point out that "la theologia es la misma" because the Vatican II made many changes to give the Church a face-lift, but the doctrine remained the same.

Mrs. Gomez lives in Dorchester, which is about a half hour drive to St. Benedict's. She was the only person I had the opportunity to interview who had a detailed history of the past recent history of St. Benedict's. I have also gotten bits and pieces from speaking to people informally that I will use to fill in the blanks. Mrs. Gomez began working with a church in Dorchester but found that most Latinos moved away from that area. She had collaborated with a priest in Dorchester, Padre Joaquin Martinez. Since both were interested in continuing work with the Latino communities Padre Joaquin and Mrs. Gomez left Dorchester to begin working at St. Benedict's Church in Somerville. For many years, these two worked with Padre Juan (Father John McLaughlin), who was the head priest at St. Benedict's. Throughout this semester I have

run into people who have spoken about Father McLaughlin with fondness and appreciation. He was one of the Catholic leaders in the forefront of embracing the Latino community in the Boston area. I interviewed Ralph Hergert, the Pastor at Grace Baptist Church in East Somerville. Mr. Hergert mentioned Pastor John McLaughlin now formerly of St. Benedict's Catholic Church, and praised him for his work with the church and the greater community. He was described as "an astonishing character", and that he played "the all-time parish priest." He is bilingual and had spent ten years working for the Archdiocese. The Boston Globe had an article in 2003 about immigrants replenishing Catholic Churches. They included this section on Father McLaughlin, "About 15 years ago, after Rev. John McLaughlin noticed a growing number of Latinos on the streets of Somerville, he started leaving notes on car windshields, in bars, and restaurants inviting the newcomers to his church. The notes read: "Usted esta en su casa." You are in your home. "The Spanish reality is a strong one," said McLaughlin, who learned to speak Spanish and is called Padre Juan by Latino parishioners. "More and more Spanish people are coming in, and we try as much as possible to welcome them."¹

Daisy Gomez, John McLaughlin, and Padre Joaquin Martinez worked together for many years with the Latino community at St. Benedict's. The work they've done can be seen in Sunday Mass and the community services they have expanded upon, such as the CCD classes. When I enquired about what her position was, Mrs. Gomez explained that she is in charge of religious classes but her work covers many areas of Church and community life. Padre Joaquin passed away last spring, and Father McLaughlin took leave this past spring as well. Spanish services are now performed by rotating priests,

¹ Parishes replenish from other shores, by Monica Rhor, Globe Staff, 7/29/2003, Boston Globe.

brought in from various places and paid for by parishioners, since Father McLaughlin's departure.

B. Pentecostal Church: Mission de Restuaracion de Elim

Pastor Jose Giron left his home in San Salvador twenty-five years ago to come to Cambridge, Massachusetts. This is around the same time conflicts in El Salvador were intensifying, leading the country into over a decade of war. Pastor Giron was only eighteen years old when he left his home country, and has spent the majority of his life in the States.

In 1999 another El Salvadoran family approached Mr. Giron about the fact that they could find churches in Somerville, where Mr. Giron as made his new home, representing other ethnic groups like Haitians and Brazilians, but they could not find one close specifically for El Salvadorans. And so the two families began meeting in Pastor Giron's house, holding services there. After only a few weeks the group had grown significantly, and one month they had around seventy people come to his house to worship. Since it would have been too burdensome to continue having that many people in a house at one time, the congregation sought out a new home. Pastor Giron spoke highly of a Brazilian Pastor in Medford that opened up his doors to this rising church. Many smaller churches that actually have a church building will rent out their space to other congregations when they are not using it in order to displace the cost of keeping up the space. They remained there for three years. It was not until the spring of 2004 that they moved into what will hopefully be their final home in a Masonic Temple off of Highland Avenue in East

Somerville. This was only about six months before I began this research. However, their numbers had clearly climbed in that short time-span.

The way this group formed is much like many Evangelical churches today. This El Salvadoran church is part of a much larger Evangelical Church that is based in Central America called, Mission Chrstiana de Restuaracion de Elim. Elim is one of the biggest evangelical churches in El Salvador. In Central America they have organized mass worships where over a 100,000 people will come together to pray. The way these groups grow is by setting up local “cells” of small groups that meet in an organizer’s house. As these groups grow, other people are trained in having these house meetings, and so these congregations can grow at an expanding rate. Since Jose Giron’s group and some others in the New England area are connected to Elim, a group of El Salvadoran Pastors were sent to the North-eastern United States to play the role of a full-time Pastor for the groups that had grown into full congregations.

Colixto Lopez came to Somerville in January of 2001. At this point there were meetings on Tuesdays and Thursdays at Jose Giron’s house, and on Sundays they were using the Brazilian church in Medford. Pastor Lopez had been working with the church since 1992 when he began organizing his own congregation in El Salvador. When Pastor Lopez was in El Salvador he said that his church was successful. On Sundays they had turnouts of 200+ people attending services. They even bussed people to church in order to build up a congregation.

He said that he came to the States out of the necessity for it, along with the other twelve Pastors that were sent. Since then they have had visiting Pastors come through from across the nation and internationally. They also had the opportunity to host the head

of the church of Elim, Mario Vela and he is scheduled to return in April of 2005. Having a connection to an international network provides real opportunity for growth of these congregations, though if it were not for the hard, long-term work of people like Jose Giron and Colixto Lopez, there wouldn't be the community support that exists.

C. Baptist Church: Vida Real

“As long as we have light we'll keep working.”

-Luis Morales

Luis “Tony” Morales was born in El Salvador, in a town called Chalatenango. He was raised Catholic and as a youth was very active in the Church. After experiencing violence from the civil war he moved away from the Honduran border, to Metapan located in the department of Santa Ana, by the Guatemalan border. He moved there in 1980 and left before the year's end for Somerville. He has lived in Somerville for the last twenty-four years. During those years he has started up four businesses he now runs, he earned himself three Masters degrees, and began his own Baptist Church. This Church is Vida Real, located on 404 Broadway Somerville, MA.

When Mr. Morales came to Somerville, he had just recently and briefly been exposed to mega-churches in El Salvador. Upon arriving here he could not find a church that would suit his needs, so he did not continue with his work with churches until nine years later. In 1989 he found an Assemblies of God church and he remained active in it for many years, until he left to set-up his own mission.

Mr. Morales has spent a good deal of time studying and becoming educated in religion and how it works with people. He spoke to me about the path of his education and how he incorporates it into his work, “I graduated from college in Christian

education and counseling. I have a Master's degree in psychology, in mental health, and I also have a Master's degree in theology so that helps me to be able to understand people's needs and the reason why God is so interested in helping people, in helping the world." His extensive education, all accomplished in his second language I may add, has helped Mr. Morales shape his approach to doing church and his philosophy for what the church should in turn, do for its people. He further expanded on his own theology, "We are responsible. We're going to protect God as a responsible God. So we should be aware that the only hands, the only eyes, the only feet that God has on Earth is us. Whatever we do, it's what's going to get done." This attitude is at the heart of evangelical thinking. Actively reaching out into the community, and catering to the needs of its parishioners is one of the cornerstones of evangelical churches. In order to accomplish this task of community outreach, evangelical churches have used technology to get their message across:

I think that my experience with mega-churches is that they take advantage of everything - take advantage of change, take advantage of technology, take advantage of radios, internet, TV and satellites – they do everything. That has been my goal now, to build up the church that will be different, that will cater to the youth that will cater to a new group of people. I believe that God has a purpose with every parishioner and the purpose is not to sit on a bench, but to do something. God created you because he has a purpose for you and nobody else will take care of that purpose but you.

The use of radio stations by evangelical groups in Latin America has been spreading like wildfire. It has been one of many methods for using media to broaden the amount of people they can reach. Many of the biggest radio stations in Latin America have been sold to evangelical groups, though I will go into this further in Chapter 8 on Recruitment and Sustainability.

These transformations and adaptations on how to do church are much related to changes in the global environment. Cultures and religions are now exposed to many more global influences than ever before. Mr. Morales made an analogy in our interview about how 90% of the world has tried Coke or Pepsi, however, only 2 billion know who Christ is. I never bothered checking those numbers but it makes a good point about how private institutions like corporations have taken advantage of every possible outlet for expansion, whereas churches have maintained their traditional strategies. Mr. Morales told me, “I have been a businessman all my life and I see church as a business, not a business that I run, but God’s business. The most rich companies in the world they have the top people in the world. The churches sometimes they don’t care about what they have and I think that the church should be no exception.”

It was November of 2004 when I interviewed Mr. Morales, by that point his church had been running for only 14 months.

I started the church that we have right now a year and two months ago. Right now we have 165 members. We just bought a building in Somerville. We have started three churches in El Salvador, one church in Honduras. We started three radio stations, FM radio stations, in El Salvador. We’re going to start a radio station on the Internet pretty soon. We have a goal that in 5 years we will have 100 churches, churches with a new vision. And some people right now they might say we’re crazy, we’re in an embryonic stage but if we keep doing what we’ve been doing so far, I think that our goals are achievable.

In a year the congregation grew from 20 to 165 individuals. In today’s culture where most churches are reporting a steady decrease in their numbers, this is an impressive accomplishment. Unlike Mission de Elim, this church is independent of any major evangelical groups. Unlike Elim that began in El Salvador and has expanded to the States, Mr. Morales is trying now to form churches back in his home country after

starting his here. Three months ago Mr. Morales began a church in El Salvador in his city of origin that had already grown to 90 people. “We started a church two months ago in San Salvador, the capital of the country. In two months we’ve gone from 13 to 50 members,” Mr. Morales told me. He was in the midst of planning a trip to Guatemala with a couple other Pastors to begin two churches there around the end of the month. The secular radio station they took over covers much of the northern part of El Salvador as well as the southern region of Guatemala. Back home, they have moved into their new home off of 404 Broadway, which they bought for \$250,000, though Mr. Morales claimed it is worth much more than that. I spoke with Mr. Morales about the specific methods he uses for starting churches. These strategies I will save for Chapter 8 where they can be discussed in more detail. One thing is clear though; these strategies seem to be working. If these numbers continues growing at the rates they are, or possibly even faster, a social movement may be taking place within the context of an institutionalized evangelical church. Evangelical churches have become a prominent factor in Latin America, and in the globalize society we live in, it may not be long before we see these sweeping changes occurring in other regions of the world.

VI. Services provided

A. Catholic Church: St. Benedict’s

St. Benedict’s has gone through many changes in the past years. There is an assortment of services provided by or at the church that the community can take advantage of. The English as a Second Language (ESL) classes held at St. Benedict’s has been running for the past 3 years. They meet 2 or 3 times a week and have grown

much since they started. St. Benedict's does not run these classes though, but they do provide the spaces for the classes to run. Unfortunately, by the time I finished this report it seemed that these classes were soon to be eliminated from being offered at St. Benedict's.

The religious classes, or Sunday school has grown exponentially since its conception. When Mrs. Gomez began at St. Benedict's she said that there were about 15 students and 2 teachers. After working for many years to better reach the community, there are now more than 400 students and 39 teachers. The classes began in one room, now they use all three floors of the school, the basement, the convent and the rectory. The youngest ages are around 3 ½ years. In my interview with Daisy Gomez from St. Benedict's, she told me about her fond memories of substituting for a Sunday school teacher. She showed me the book she read to the children that day, it is called Does God Know How to Tie Shoes? She told me how the next week when she asked the kids if they had thought about the book, one little girl claimed that since God is a spirit, he does not have legs and so does not need shoes. Mrs. Gomez was clearly excited about working with the young children and seemed to really enjoy this aspect of her work. All teachers, and Mrs. Gomez provide their work free of charge. On top of that, they buy many things for the CCD (Continuing Christian Development) classes and the children.

I brought up the rise of evangelical churches, especially within the Latino community, and asked Mrs. Gomez if she thought the Catholic Church could do a better job at recruiting parishioners. She mentioned a program called Outreach where everybody is supposed to go out and invite others to come to the Church. She said that Padre Joaquin used to say "to have a person happy, you do not go and talk to that person

about God without finding out first how this person feels, if [the person] is hungry, or if [the person] needs any help.” She spoke about the importance of connecting on a personal level before preaching to someone. Mrs. Gomez said, “There is a lot of pain and suffering... and if I don’t try to reach what’s the matter with you, what’s going on with you in a very compassionate and Christian way, it is no matter what I talk to you about God. We have to try to heal first and then talk about God, that is the way it should be done.” Mrs. Gomez contrasted this attitude with one that’s approach is more along the lines of defining people as either Catholic or not. Before the Second Vatican, an aspect that was emphasized was how Catholicism is the true faith, and non-Catholics were condemned for not being believers. In the second Vatican, this point was downplayed, and acceptance of other Christian faiths was promoted. From listening to Mrs. Gomez, it seemed that she had met others who were more partial to the older attitude of emphasizing the Doctrine over the people. She illustrated her point by stating how she believes that not only Catholics go to heaven, and that it is made up of many faiths. Her concern is for her brothers and sisters as humans before whether they are Catholic or not.

B. Pentecostal Church: Mission de Restuaracion de Elim

Jose Giron discussed with me the relationship their Church has with other Churches in the area, as well as the greater community. Every six months they hold classes where they invite all of the surrounding Churches and teach the Gospel. When Hurricane Mitch tore through Honduras, they called many people and got supplies and assistance to send down to help out the relief effort. Locally the group has been working with gangs, teaching them the gospel. Every Monday night they have a place in

Somerville to meet. A member of the Church who knows some kids invites these youths to come out. Mr. Giron talked about how they welcome them, “Like I said before, we invite you to come to my house, we give you juice, and we’re talking. And a little by a little we give the gospel and they say, ‘Wow, I never hear that’.” With efforts like this one to better the community, Mr. Giron spoke about improving relations with other community members. He said that he feels free from anyone giving them a hard time because even the police understand that they want to have a positive impact on the community. Mr. Giron talked about some of the influences in the rise of gangs and violence. “The family is the cornerstone of these youths’ moral values. If the parents don’t raise their kids with strong values then their kids won’t want to do the right thing.”

As someone who had a firsthand experience of coming over as an immigrant, Mr. Giron reflected on the importance of the Church. When people come over here sometimes they have nothing and usually don’t speak the language. Two days after arriving in Cambridge in ’78, Boston had a major snowstorm. It was a despairing experience for someone who was alone and had never even seen snow before in person. But he went to the Church that Sunday and they found him a job.

Just recently a young man came to Somerville from El Salvador and the congregation heard about him. The young man was given an address for a cousin that turned out not to be a valid address. They found him on the streets of Somerville and told him that they speak Spanish and that they are also from El Salvador. They took him to the Church and their Pastor took him to his house to stay and help him look for a job.

I asked if there were any other resources in the community that help immigrants and community members like the Church does. Mr. Giron spoke about useful resources

for language classes and other services provided by places such as, Centro Presente and the Welcome Project. A difference that he pointed out though, is that other places will do some things for free but will charge people for providing services. The Church however, never charges money for helping people out, the only ask for donations at each service from whoever is willing. From sitting in on the service I noted that most people do give when the baskets are passed around with a few dollars. These active community outreach strategies make evangelical churches like this one more attractive for community residents. The church becomes more than a place of worship, it is a community center and support group as well.

C. Baptist Church: Vida Real

Vida Real is a young church, just over a year. Because of this the services they are able to provide outside of church are limited. Many of these services have to do with recruitment and expansion of their congregation. “One of our best programs that we have is to teach every single individual that you’re capable of achieving things. We have schools for leaders, 5 steps, 5 courses, one year where we teach you on how not just to be a religious person, not just to be someone who comes to church, but somebody who has a ministry in church,” said Mr. Morales. These leadership classes are the basis of the cell groups that exist in parishioner’s homes. Other ways in which Mr. Morales tries to expand his parishioner’s horizons is through technology and encouraging education, “So leadership techniques we teach the people they don’t just help them in church, we help you in everyday life. I encourage people to go to school. I encourage people to study, to read. Right now we have a program where we’re opening an email to every member to get them used to the computer, to get used to the Internet, to the technology.” This

informal guidance may seem trivial, however, it is part of the core philosophy of using whatever methods are out there to preach the word of God.

Mr. Morales also mentioned that they had recently done work with some of the Latino gang members in Somerville. The issue of youths and gangs has been a rising issue in Somerville and other surrounding areas for a couple years now. Going out into the community to address problems like this one is a way in which Mr. Morales sees his church as different from the Catholic Church:

We've helped two of the major gang leaders. We have helped them leave the gangs and join the church. We do a lot of work. The Catholic Church has a philosophy of it's Sunday come to church. We have a philosophy it doesn't matter whether it's Sunday we got to go to church and not just that but we don't come to church, church comes to us. We have cell groups. We go to the people. We don't wait for the people to come to us.

These programs are likely to be just the beginning of this churches work in the community. Once there are more funds and they have become better established I do not doubt that Mr. Morales will waste no time in expanding their activities and work with their community.

VII. Religious Ceremonies

A. Catholic Church: St. Benedict's

I had the opportunity to attend Catholic Mass in Spanish a couple times over the semester I did this research. On my second visit to Sunday morning Mass the church was crowded so I stood in the back with many other Latino men. I happened to be standing next to a closet that contained the donation baskets as one man was pulling them out. When he reached his arm towards me with the basket I was taken back for a moment and

then immediately seized on the opportunity to take part in this cultural event. Before we walked around, the basket holders and I approached the front of the church as a few children offered their prayers. Needless to say, this was a wonderful, however brief experience of real ethnographic work. Some of the particular aspects of the Mass I noted were the unusually vibrant music that was played at various times. This music is uniquely El Salvadoran and is a symbol of how the Catholic Church has made an effort to incorporate Latin American culture into the way they do church.

Daisy Gomez told me that, “El Musico es uno de las factoras mas importantes de la Masa.” When there is no music during a Mass, it is “muerte”. Mrs. Gomez said that singing during prayer is important because of the passion it inspires for parishioners. You pray once without singing, when you sing you “praise [G-d] twice.” She also explained that during the Mass there are numerous times for music, and each part has different music for it. There is the welcoming music, the meditation music, the praise music, celebration music, etc. Each component has its own purpose and sound.

In order to involve children better into the Mass, a part of the Mass was added at St. Benedict’s for children to line up during the time of Peace and approach the Father at the front of the Church. Mrs. Gomez talked about how, for children, Church is an “obliga” to one’s parents, grandparents, or whoever. Children do not understand much of the Mass’s significance, but they do understand something real or concrete like standing and lining up during a part of the Mass. The purpose of this is to give the children something that is for them, and not just as an obligation to someone else.

Other services are held for Latinos at St. Benedict’s, such as a religious gathering for youth on Friday nights. A friend of mine at Tufts who attends Spanish Mass on

Sundays introduced me to Douglas Escabir, a teacher of CCD classes. He invited me to attend this Friday night prayer session for youth in the basement of the church, which is used as an additional space for various activities. Floral El Salvadoran decorations could be seen all over the room. Juan Tejada ran the prayer. With guitar in hand, Mr. Tejada quoted biblical text and sang hymns with the group of eight or so made up of youth and adults. The prayer was held entirely in Spanish so my understanding of the language was lacking. What I could perceive was how powerful of a meeting this could be for some. Accompanied by the classical guitar, singing these religious prayers together had a clear personal impact on many there. Ironically, this small prayer session seemed to reflect the format of the “cell” groups set up in the houses of evangelical leaders. The informal atmosphere of being in a small space with an intimate group gave the prayers and songs all the more meaning because of the personal collective experience. I wondered if this reflection had to do with a Catholic response to the rising popularity of evangelicals, or if these smaller prayer sessions captured a part of El Salvadoran religious culture that is not well expressed in large churches. Cell groups have a specific strategic meaning for evangelicals, but their success may be in part due to the way they provide a religious experience that is more familiar to El Salvadoran culture.

B. Pentecostal Church: Mission de Restuaracion de Elim

I had never been to a Pentecostal church before visiting the Masonic lodge off of Highland Avenue where the Elim group meets. The first day I showed up for services a very nice ten year old invited me into their church and translated parts of the service for

me. Everyone there welcomed me warmly. In my interview with Pastor Giron we spoke about some aspects of the religious ceremonies.

Having attended a couple services, I asked about some of the different parts of the service. During the service, many will sing hymns and different religious music. This description doesn't really do it justice because it is quite an enthusiastic and emotional performance (and Mr. Giron, who leads the songs is an excellent singer). The purpose of the songs is "to put the people into the God's hands," says Giron. People will often come into the Church after a long workday and will be in a bad mood or feel that they would rather be at home and not talk to anyone. What Mr. Giron tries to do is make people feel good and uplift their spirits so they feel a connection to God in their hearts. Special prayers are given for those in need. At the service that night they had a special prayer for a young man who needs an apartment. Making an effort to comfort people and show them that other people care them for can have dramatic affect.

Pastor Giron told me about how there was a sick girl whose family came to the pastor and said you must pray for her, so they decided to go to this family's house. The girl had paralysis of the face so she covered her face when they came. When they came they told her to take it off, and they sat down to pray. After twenty minutes the girl's face began to come into form. Mr. Giron attributed this to feeling God in her heart the same way that people do when they hear the music in services.

During the service I was struck by what I thought at first was an emotional outburst. At the end of the singing a few members stood up at the end of the pews as one woman began to recite a blessing to God. She was clearly weeping and almost screamed the blessing, which went on for a few minutes. I later learned that this is what's known

as speaking in tongues. This is defined by speech or vocal sounds produced in a state of religious ecstasy. “This is one of the best moments, when God blesses the people.” The reason they have certain people rise during this blessing is to show respect and to make sure that all pay attention. The prayer is about hope that God will do something good for them and care for them. The emotion not just behind this part, but the entire service, is significant because when people come in to Church they want to “hear something with power.” In turn they always want to present the Gospel stronger and stronger so people will feel that connection.

C. Baptist Church: Vida Real

I did not have the opportunity to attend services at Mr. Morales’ church. In our interview, he discussed the significance of music in what he tries to accomplish with how he wants to do church. Mr. Morales was clearly proud of the musical outfit they have representing their church:

LM: Excellent. The drum player is a professional, the keyboard player is one of the best, everybody. And the music is not boring; the music is, you know, we cater to the youth. We just had in my church, we have our own generation of music called Praise and Worship, *Alabanza et Adoracion*. But the guy who started Praise and Worship in Latin America, one Carlos Alverad, he came to our church 2 weekends ago. We bring singers every few months, the top singers in Latin America.

So, we’re a different church. We try not to be a boring church. Why should church be boring? We can only be boring when the people who lead it are boring. But it should be happy, a happy church, it should be a very progressive church, and it should be people who think differently. That’s the challenge I throw to every parishioner.

Music and religion seem to go hand-in-hand with each other for El Salvadoran culture. Whenever I asked anyone about the significance of music in prayer, they would tell me about how it enhances their religious connection to God. Mr. Morales explained this point to me as well as why then it is important to have this music be quality:

LM: We have six purposes in our church. One of the purposes that we believe that God created us was to praise him. When we all die and then when we all go to heaven all we're going to do is praise him. So this is like where you rehearse for that day. And for us, the music is key because the music touches God's heart. Music touches His heart. When we touch God's heart we feel His presence and He starts touching our hearts. It is this combination of feelings that you start really praising God. God's heart. Music touches His heart. When we touch God's heart we feel his presence and he starts touching our hearts. It is this combination of feelings that you start really praising God. You forget about all your problems, all you do is praise God. By the time you leave the church, you had a presence so great that your faith is strengthened. A lot of people who come without jobs, they leave the church believing that they will have a job. Talking from a psychologist's perspective, it's the best therapy in the world, the best experience in the world. But we don't just have slow music, we have Latin American gospel singers right now, who are ranking top among all the secular singers, very professional. The level of professionalism of gospel singers, is that even the secular recording studios are getting started to get interested in them, recording their music and marketing their music. They have found that it's an opportunity to make money. So, we have quality music. My son is 12 and he's a professional drum player. His dream is to go to Berkeley some day. He has been playing the drums since he was 4 years old. We believe, at least in my church, that when you do something, do it well. Mediocre people, you find them everywhere, quality people you don't find them everywhere. But quality people were not born with those qualities, they develop those qualities. My goal is develop quality, and we are not afraid to invest. Our instruments are the best instruments. My microphone, the one I use to preach, cost 700 bucks. Every microphone we use is top quality, speaking of everything. So, it's a different church.

The amount of investment Mr. Morales has put into his church and religious training is considerable. Just the amount of time he has invested says a lot about Mr. Morales' dedication and commitment to his long-term vision. If you are interested in experiencing these ceremonies, services are held on Friday nights and on Sundays at 404 Broadway in East Somerville.

VIII. Recruitment and Sustainability

In this section, I will address methods of recruitment I have found out about by evangelical churches, as well as ways the Catholic Church has moved in this direction. The most significant strategy for growth has been through the cell groups of evangelicals. In my interview with Mr. Morales he explained to me the way a cell group can be created. I asked Mr. Morales how he finds a family that will start a cell group, whether it is in Somerville or El Salvador. He told me, “What I do is I locate a family, a family that is willing to believe in the vision. The main thing for me is not to start a church. The main thing for me is to get a person that will grasp the vision because a church without a vision is not a church.” The cell groups have a clear timetable where every three months there are goals to be met. Mr. Morales explained to me how he trains his parishioners to become ministers themselves:

In order for you to be a leader, you have to have followers. So, the first goal we assign you is that you should open your own cell group. We give you a year to have 12. We give you the techniques on how to find them. When you get to have 12, you grow to 18, you grow to 24. Out of those 24 you keep the 12 that you want. The same thing that I did with you, you do with them. They go through the same school. I have my own 12 people. My 12 should have their own 12, and their twelve should have their own 12. By the time we visit the third generation of 12, we should have 1700 people. So that’s how we work.

It is this kind of exponential growth that has lead Vida Real to grow by almost 150 people in a year. At a time when most churches are losing numbers, this is an impressive feat. Cell groups usually operate on Saturdays inside the homes of parishioners.

In my interview with Daisy Gomez I asked her if she thought the Catholic Church could do a better job at recruiting people. She mentioned a program called Outreach where everybody is supposed to go out and invite others to come to the Church. She said that Padre Joaquin used to say “to have a person happy, you do not go and talk to that person about God without finding out first how this person feels, if [the person] is hungry, or if [the person] needs any help.” This reaching out into the community could not make their congregation grow like cell groups can, though the idea of connecting with people on a real level and actively seeking them out recognizes a similar need to change how church is traditionally done. Within an institution like Catholicism that is based on tradition and takes pride in its constancy, this acknowledgment has come slow. In contrast, many evangelical groups take pride in their ability to mold themselves in whatever way needed to attract more people, and keep up their attendance and support.

IX. Conclusions

This oral history project has taken an in-depth look at three Latino churches in Somerville. The purpose of this project was to get a better understanding of Latino culture in this specific area in connection to religious life and practices. By sampling two relatively new evangelical churches along with a Catholic Church with a long history, I was able to do my analysis within a broader social context of the Christian revitalization movement that has been stemming out of Latin America.

Religion and religious fundamentalism have been popular options for collective identity in the absence of secular nationalism. Having lost faith in nations to achieve or recognize personally held goals, beliefs and values, as would be likely after years of

conflict and instability, many people across the world have turned to religion to fill this gap. This may be the spark that has led to the rise of fundamentalists' movements and revitalization movements. In other words, the need for power over one's destiny, when no longer found through governments, can be alternatively sought-out through more grassroots based organizations, such as evangelical churches. Therefore, these churches are not just for personal well being, but they also provide a sense of being part of something larger than themselves or their immediate community.

Evangelical churches have done a remarkable job of catering to this growing need of people to feel they are a part of a collective whole. Their growth can be attributed to the basic principal of doing church in a progressive rather than, traditional way. I came from a progressive grade/high school, and much of the theories on progressive education, in contrast to traditional styles parallel the dichotomy between traditional forms of church and progressive approaches to Church.

A progressive sees traditional education as only preparation for future life experiences instead of education as a constant continuum that happens as we experience life. This education is defined as occurring between an individual (psychological) and its social context (sociological). Education therefore is the individual psyche responding to its social environment through its cumulative experiences. Based on this theory, if teachers do not meet pupils and understand that their methods for learning will reflect the cumulative experiences the student has had then they are ignoring an entire feature of development, treating the student as inert matter. As Daisy Gomez spoke about connecting with people on a real level before talking to them about God, evangelical groups understand that we must understand the social and psychological context of

individuals before they start recruiting parishioners. Tony Morales spoke about not making church boring for people because, “I find out what people want. It’s not what I want to tell them. I find out what their needs are. Based on those needs, that’s how I prepare my sermons. It’s not, this is what I got for you, swallow it if you want. Church shouldn’t be that way.” Instead of a prescribed set of lessons people must come and be told by the single leader at the front, evangelicals approach church by recognizing that every individual can become a leader in spreading the Gospel. The Catholic Church separates their leaders from the congregation, allowing activity on a much more limited basis for those interested.

Religion and education have been institutionalized, and so they suffer from the, usually institutional ills of rigidity and inflexibility. Progressive church and progressive schooling are associated with challenging this rigidity by considering the ways in which our psyche learns from responding to its social environment through real-life experience. Evangelical groups have adapted a more progressive way of doing church because it is more effective in stimulating individuals to join a church if they can relate to what they are doing.

One way, that would be easy to overlook, in which many evangelical groups have tried to better relate to people is through music. Having good quality music in styles that all can relate to makes church a more appealing prospect to people. The significance of music in prayer can be seen through the many comments I have included from Pastors about how it can have a real effect on our psyche and state of mind. This is just one example of the ways in which evangelicals (and some Catholic groups to a lesser extent) have incorporated progressive ways to do church and attract more recruits.

X. Reflections

This oral history project proved to be extra-ordinarily challenging. I had never taken a project like it on before. Having no real background on the subject at hand, religion among Latinos in the Somerville community, research began slowly and interviews came slower. Without a social network into a place or group, it is easiest to dive right into participant observation if you want to break into a research group. That was how I began my research, and much of the information I gathered could be attributed from those experiences and the education they provided me with. After sitting through a few services I was able to create questions based on what I saw and experienced. Without this aspect, research is leaned much more on second-hand interpretation and selections being passed along, which is an excellent resource but is enhanced with varieties of research. I emphasize participant observation for many other reasons, namely being able to relate the feelings of experiencing the same things one is studying, gives the observer an idea of the implicit affects and influences these experiences can have. I am not religious but after spending an hour in the Pentecostal service I felt like I was a part of the group singing and praying passionately together. One may have some surprising experiences through participant observation as well. During all of the Spanish services I attended, there were times when congregants turn to one another and offer each other peace and caring with a handshake and hug. I will remember for a long time the warmth and affection perfect strangers offered an odd-looking kid who came out of nowhere.

My final observation is on the importance of placing one's analysis of anthropological research into a broader social context. Every social interaction occurs

within its historical and geographical context. Placing even small anthropological studies into this context gives a report all the more meaning and significance. I wish I had taken this into consideration more by placing my narrators into a better context by getting richer backgrounds on where they were coming from. I could have written this report solely about the 3 churches studied and the activities they are involved in, and it would be a decent piece of anthropology. This report, I think, is strengthened greatly by understanding these churches within the context in which they occur. As a final note, I would like to say that this has been an incredible and genuinely challenging experience of experiential learning that I could not be more thankful for having the opportunity to undergo.