

**III National Consultation on Hispanic/Latino Ministry:
An Invitation to Reflect on our Understanding and Practice of Ministry
In The Context of the XXI Century**

*“For too long the Church has stayed behind closed doors.
Long ago, John Wesley affirmed that the world is our parish.
So why are we, the Church, still cloistered behind closed doors?
It is time to connect with the world”*

David Wildman

The most recent U.S. Census report that the Hispanic/Latino population is becoming the largest minority group in the U.S. is a sensationalist claim – but *not*, however, because the projections aren't true. The fact is that even though 53 million Hispanic/Latinos form the largest minority group in this nation, the vastness of the numbers doesn't correlate to the community's self-image, and perception of its own standing and position in U.S. society today.

On the one hand, it is interesting to consider how the media, the internet, politicians and businesses assign a level of perceived market potential, power and expectation from our community. Alternately, these same entities are known to imbue a perception of threat to the overall society through our very presence here in the U.S. All the while, the Hispanic/Latino community itself is still in the process of discovering and appreciating itself regarding who we are and how significantly we are contributing to the cross-cultural vitality, multi-ethnic enrichment, language diversity, and gifts and talents to this nation.

Hispanic/ Latinos in the United States are more than first or second generation; the community is immensely complex, younger, diverse, vibrant, rich... It's a 360-degree range of world views, cultural backgrounds, political leanings and theological perspectives. If this were not enough of a rich and varied tapestry the forces of the new technological changes and worldwide perspective are tossing us all into a spin that is almost impossible to keep our institutional relevancy by continuing to practice the ministerial paradigms of a hundred years ago.

From the vantage point of the National Plan for Hispanic/Latino Ministry, I work to interpret the different dynamics and patterns suggested by the demographics of

the different racial and ethnic groups. This has helped me to reflect more on the importance of their socio-economic, political and religious distinctions rather than their astounding and growing numbers that the mass media has already begun to dramatize.

As we cross into the gates of the XXI century, we have also gotten into the divisive debate on the impact of migrant communities on the life of this country. As paradoxical as this might sound, the debate has been instrumental for politicians, business communities and religious leaders to become aware of the reality that the composition of the Hispanic/Latino population is undergoing a fundamental transformation as technology and globalization transform the wholeness of our globe.

Hispanic/Latinos continue to grow in numbers but this in fact is not driven by migration as many people assume, but instead by birth rate. The U.S. Census Bureau reported that by the end of 2012, 63 out of a 100 Hispanics are between the ages of 18 - 27; they are bilingual with English as their primary language; they are cross-cultural and they are native of this country. This shift, that started to be more evident at the beginning of the year 2000, is reshaping the composition of our population and challenging the current strategies and outreach programs of The United Methodist Church. The indifferent reaction from most of our denominational leaders to this new profile of Hispanic/Latinos in the U.S. is expressed in the persistent invitation of foreign pastoral leaders whose practice of ministry is mainly in Spanish, who lack the basic cross-cultural and theological training and who are desperately trying to mirror a core of doctrines and liturgical acts different from our own Wesleyan tradition.

Contrary to this insensitive, discriminatory and non-productive strategy, we have on the other hand, the foresight of UNIVISION, the nation's top Spanish-language network, together with ABC NEWS, announcing their new cable channel called FUSION. This is their new effort to reinvent their marketing strategies to reach a Hispanic/Latino population whose primary language is English and which represents a robust economic and political future in this nation. This visionary marketing strategy is done with a clear awareness of the differences in the culture, religious, political and economic values, even including across generations. Duplicating these strategies would be significant steps for us on transforming our old strategies and programs into something more relevant to the needs and expectations of our potential constituency.

These bold steps reflect some of the new demographic trends in the Hispanic/Latino context, showing the disposition of the media industry to reinvent itself in order to respond effectively to the needs and expectations of their new audience – an audience that represents 17% of the U.S. general population.

Flexibility, veracity and respect are key ingredients in any type of relationship. By becoming flexible enough to adjust our perception and understanding of the new and distinctive Hispanic/Latino people, it will empower us to strengthen our relationships as parents, educators and religious leaders with our own community as well with the rest of society.

As this new reality arises in parallel to the needs and expectations from our own mother church, we as National Plan for Hispanic/Latino Ministry must redirect our own creativity, energy and resources under the imperative process of reinventing our methodology of contextualizing our mission and role in society. To develop new bilingual, cross-cultural and cross-generational resources could help us move in the direction of forming the kind of leaders that our new communities require. This could be just the beginning of a new and exciting journey. It must include being fully aware of the variety represented within the community. It must have a clear view of the existing resources across our connection in order to identify, nurture and develop relevant lay and pastoral leadership on the XXI century.

As we reaffirmed, our commitment to continue providing the necessary and focused level of accompaniment to annual conferences, districts and local congregations, we are mindful that this new reality is pressing us, as the body of Christ, to convene a III National Consultation on Hispanic/Latino Ministry at the School of Religion of Duke University on March 12 – 14 of 2015.

The main purpose of the III National Consultation is to provide the sacred space to originate a communal process of reflection and dialogue to find effective alternatives on how to re-articulate our theological and ministerial understanding in light of the new composition of the Hispanic/Latinos in the US and society in general in this new millennium.