

BOSTON COLLEGE
School of Theology and Ministry
Institute of Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry - IREPM

*National Symposium on the Present and Future of
Catholic Hispanic Ministry in the United States
June 8-10, 2009*

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Background

In recent years Boston College's Institute of Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry (IREPM), now part of BC's School of Theology and Ministry, has become increasingly attentive to the Church's changing population in the United States, particularly the Hispanic presence. The Institute began to respond to the challenges of ministerial formation of Hispanic Catholics by revising and enhancing its Hispanic Ministry graduate programs and hiring Hispanic faculty. This renewed effort not only has enjoyed success beyond expectations, but also has placed the IREPM as a leading institution of ministerial formation of Catholic Hispanics nationwide.

The Hispanic presence is transforming the Church in the United States. Currently 43 percent of Catholics in the U.S. are Hispanic (approx. 30 million) and it is estimated that in less than 20 years Latinos/as will constitute more than half the Catholic population in this country. Unfortunately, the efforts of ministerial formation of Hispanics, the establishment of adequate mechanisms of leadership transition, and the development of appropriate models of ministry to meet the needs of Hispanic Catholics have not kept up with the challenges posed by the recent growth. Events such as the *Encuentros* (encounters), involving the participation of thousands of Hispanic leaders from all levels in the Church to celebrate and reflect about the Hispanic presence, yielded important networks of collaboration and inspired key documents related to Hispanic Ministry. However, most Hispanic leaders and scholars agree that today Hispanic Ministry is at a crossroads and needs a more defined vision, particularly at a moment when funding is limited and offices of Hispanic Ministry around the country are being merged with other offices as part of organizational restructuring. It is imperative that Hispanic and non-Hispanic scholars and leaders from around the country gather together to envision fresher directions and horizons for Hispanic Ministry today. Thus, we propose to host a *National Symposium on the Present and Future of Catholic Hispanic Ministry in the United States*.

The Symposium

This *Symposium* will be a gathering of a select group of approximately 60 academic, ecclesial, and pastoral leaders from around the country whose work and leadership is widely recognized as crucial to determine the future directions of ministry among Hispanic Catholics in the U.S. Important to the symposium is the presence of several bishops committed to the development of solid initiatives in Catholic Hispanic Ministry around the country.

This project envisions three phases:

- A. Preparation. Early in 2008 we will contact potential participants and confirm their involvement. During the spring and summer of 2008 a team of scholars and practitioners in the field will develop seven “study documents”, send them to participants for analysis, and integrate their responses into a working version of the documents. The seven areas of study are: a) Hispanic Ministry and American Catholicism, b) Hispanic Ministry and Theology, c) Hispanic Ministry and Christian Religious Education/Catechesis, d) Hispanic Ministry, Liturgy and Spirituality, e) Hispanic Youth and Young Adult Ministry, f) Hispanic Ministry and Social Justice, and g) Hispanic Ministry and Leadership Formation.
- B. Celebration. Participants will gather for three days in June 2009 to discuss the current status of Hispanic Catholic ministry in the country, to envision the horizon where future efforts should be conceived, and to propose pastoral strategies to reach such horizon.
- C. Follow up. The symposium’s results will be published as a book and distributed among pastoral leaders and scholars working in Hispanic Ministry around the country. We will develop a symposium webpage linked to Boston College’s initiatives in Hispanic Ministry. Finally, we will oversee the publication of articles and essays related to the topics developed at the symposium and will coordinate the presentation of the gathering’s conclusions at major meetings and conferences within the next year. This third phase will guarantee that the impact of the project is sustained during the years following the symposium.

Three groups will directly benefit from this effort: 1) the scholars, practitioners, and Church leaders attending. This will be an opportunity to collaboratively envision a clearer horizon for Hispanic Ministry and plan together for the immediate future. 2) Hispanic Ministry leaders and scholars from around the country. They will receive the conclusions of the Symposium to use them as reference to plan their ministry and guide their academic/pastoral reflections over the next ten years. 3) Hispanic Catholic leadership at the grassroots levels. A summary report will be distributed via national mailing lists from various institutions directly working in Hispanic ministry. Nearly 7,000 Hispanic leaders and others working with Hispanic Catholics in the United States will receive the report.

The *National Symposium on the Present and Future of Catholic Hispanic Ministry in the United States* is an important event to reflect on an urgent priority for the Church in the United States. Ministry without vision diminishes the effectiveness of the Church’s mission. The celebration of this symposium will surely become a turning point in the Church’s outreach to Hispanic Catholics, pastorally and scholarly.

The Symposium is being co-sponsored by Barry University’s Institute for Hispanic/Latino Theology and Ministry. We have also received the endorsement of the National Catholic Council for Hispanic Ministry (NCCHM), an umbrella organization that gathers more than 60 organizations and institutions serving Hispanic Catholics; the Office for Hispanic Affairs which is part of the Office for Cultural Diversity in the Church at the USCCB. Two Hispanic bishops (Jaime Soto and Ricardo García) have made the commitment to participate in the event and two Cardinals will potentially join us.

Your support to this project and your presence will guarantee the success of a very significant event in the most recent history of Hispanic Catholicism in the U.S.

*Document prepared by Hosffman Ospino, Ph.D., Director of Hispanic Ministry Programs, STM/IREPM
April 28, 2008*