

Latino Ministry Strategy



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

The background image shows two young boys of Hispanic descent laughing joyfully in front of a brick church building. The boy on the left is wearing a grey t-shirt with a large white cross graphic and a gold chain. The boy on the right is wearing a white tank top. The church has a prominent green steeple with a cross on top. The sky is blue with some clouds. In the bottom left corner, there are several overlapping circles in various colors (yellow, orange, red, blue, purple) of different sizes, some with a gradient effect.

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CONTENTS

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Foreword

3 Areas for Development

- 3 Resources and Partnerships
- 5 Leadership
- 7 Development of Relevant and Contextual Congregations and Missions
- 8 Presence and Participation

9 Appendix A

- 9 Companion Synod Relationships/
Relaciones con Sínodos Compañeros

Introduction

The Latino community is a “community of communities.” Various cultural streams have contributed to the genesis of this very diverse people. Indigenous, African, Asian, and European cultures are reflected in the multicultural identity of our community, resulting in a diversity considered by many Latinos as a gift from God. In the same manner, regarding its religious aspect, Roman Catholic and Reformed Church influences continue to feed the Christian spirituality of our population.

We now consider ourselves as a spiritual and cultural stream that nurtures and contributes to the emergent diversity in the United States and the Caribbean. Our contribution is based upon an understanding of our Christian and historic responsibility, observing our transformation from objects of the Gospel to subjects of the Gospel.

We have come to this condition—from being objects of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and, consequently, recipients of the Good News of Salvation; to becoming subjects of the Gospel. That is, the means through which God is renewing the Gospel proclamation around the world, particularly in the United States of America.

The Latino population in the United States has surpassed 54 million, according to research done in the summer of 2013 by Pew Research Hispanic Trends Project. We are now—at 54.1 million—the second largest ethnic group in the U.S. We make up 17% of the U.S. population. The majority are born in the U.S. because immigration has declined. We are also the youngest ethnic group, averaging 27 years of age.¹

Our values enrich the diversity that exists in the U.S. We provide our strength to meet existing weaknesses; we are also strengthened by other cultures. Our people are involved in almost every productive area in this country; farm fields, universities, hospitals, even the hallways of government buildings.

Our enriching and benevolent presence in the United States of America is only an example of the way in which our community adds value to practically all communities in the world. Thus, without Latinos, human community would be incomplete.

We offer the strength of a community based in family life, community life that affirms our individuality, a strength forged by years of oppression, the impulse of an immigrant community not contained by borders, a vast experience in racial mixture and mestizaje, and values inspired by Latino faith and spirituality.

We are here to stay and to participate in building and developing this country, aware that we can offer capable and well-trained leaders to be a part of the decision making processes.

Therefore, as Latinos in the context of the United States and members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), we present to the Latino Lutheran community—as well as to the entire membership of the ELCA—this revision of the ELCA Latino Ministry Strategy, to be implemented within the next five years.

¹ Facts for National Hispanic Heritage Month, *Pew Research Center*, Sept. 6, 2014

Foreword

The Latino Ministry Strategy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) was adopted by the ELCA Churchwide Assembly in Indianapolis, Indiana, in 2001.

In 2009, the Biennial Assembly of the Lutheran Association for Hispanic Ministries asked for a revision of this strategy, because it needed updating. The primary audience of the original strategy was the ELCA Churchwide Office. The structure in existence at that time had changed and it became necessary to adapt this strategy to the actual needs of Latino leadership and ministries.

Although the ELCA Latino Lutheran community continues to be the “community united in Christ: strong, faithful, and prophetic, responding to God’s call and the needs of the world,”² as was defined in the original strategy, changes occurring in the community in this decade warrant that new opportunities be considered in order to act as fully as the strategy defines it.

For instance, a national survey about Latinos and religion took place recently. Pew Research Center was responsible for it and over 5,000 Latinos participated.³ The most important finding was that, although the majority of Latinos continue to belong to the Roman Catholic Church, a growing number states they are either Protestant or not affiliated with any denomination. This finding presents great opportunities for the mission of Latino ministries in the ELCA and merits following up.

In the following pages we will show how our community will endeavor to carry out its ministry and mission by developing leadership and resources. The areas addressed on these pages are considered “areas for development.” The people from our community who have collaborated in this document wish that it be useful to our Latino ministries.



² Latino Ministry Strategy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2001. Page 3

³ The Shifting Religious Identity of Latinos in the United States, *Pew Forum*, May 2014

Areas for Development

Resources and Partnerships

This area refers to potential relationships—both inside and outside of the three expressions of the church⁴—which, by means of dialogue, exchanging of resources, media, and changing technologies, contribute to the full development of the mission of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), by:

1. Identifying and promoting recognition of the gifts and talents existing in the Latino community—both individually and in community—in order that they may be appreciated and used effectively for the benefit of the church and the communities. This will take place through the joint efforts of the Director for Latino Ministries, Directors for Evangelical Mission (DEMs), and congregational leadership, and will be achieved by:
 - a. Preparing a list of human resources in Latino Ministries of the ELCA, experienced in various lines of work and able to train others. Using this information, a training strategy relating to the particular needs of each location will be set up.
 - b. Collaborating in the development of pilot business projects in some Latino ministries to aid in their sustainability and which can be used later as models for other ELCA Latino ministries.
 - c. Strengthening and promoting projects already in existence within Latino or multicultural congregations—or some of their members—in order to assist Latino communities in the discovery of their gifts and talents.
 - d. Periodically implementing workshops about changing technology, management and administration, education, and resources to strengthen ministry.
2. Providing the tools needed to develop these resources, in order that they can be multiplied and available for the mission of the church. This will be achieved through the collaboration of the Director for Latino Ministries, DEMs, and congregational leaders, by:
 - a. Encouraging the use of existing workshops—such as “Dones en Acción”—that help identify gifts and talents of participants in the three expressions of the church and/or creating new workshops adapted to the changing generational needs in Latino Lutheran congregations. These workshops can be about finance, cooperatives, community organization, and others. These workshops should be available to Lutheran Latino communities, in order that they may be trained to participate in community and entrepreneurial organizations in search of the common good.
 - b. Asking synods to provide options for health and well-being (treatment of addictions, rehab, mental health, counseling, family assistance, food programs, etc.) available to members of Latino congregations in their own language.
3. Encouraging the joint efforts between our Latino communities and our Full Communion partners, in order to give witness of our Christian unity. This will be achieved jointly by the Director for New Congregations, the Ecumenical Network for the Development of Latino Congregations (REDIL, by their initials in Spanish), the Director for Latino Ministries, DEMs, Synodical Coordinators for Latino Ministries (where they already exist), and congregational leadership, by promoting the participation of Latino communities in resource and support networks, be they ethnic and/or ecumenical.

⁴ ELCA Churchwide offices, synods, and local congregations

4. Developing alliances with educational communities that offer programs in Spanish—which respect our theology, as our denominations respects other religious beliefs—in order to open the doors of academic learning to the Latino community. This will be the responsibility of the Director for Leadership, in cooperation with Lutheran and ecumenical religious institutions, by:
 - a. Identifying existing theological education programs in Spanish, made through agreements with other denominations and theological institutions, in order to create new programs, adapted to the needs of our Latino Lutheran community.
 - b. Promoting those programs as opportunities for theological education in Spanish.
5. Strengthening the existing relationships with Lutheran churches in Latin America, by means of ELCA Global Mission, in search of mutual communion and collaboration. (See Appendix A; a listing of ELCA synods in accompaniment with Latin American churches.) In order to achieve this, the Director for Latino Ministries is requested to convene a task force made up of the Unit for Global Mission Director for Latin America and the Caribbean and the Leadership Team of the Unit for Domestic Mission (DMU), in order to develop a bank of pastoral, educational, and theological resources, among others—both Lutheran, as well as ecumenical—to aid pastoral and ministerial work in Latino congregations in the United States, Latin America, and other Spanish-speaking countries.
6. Strengthening and accompanying the immigrant community in the United States. This will be the responsibility of the Director for Latino Ministries, along with the Director for Latin America and the Caribbean of the Unit for Global Mission, who will:
 - a. Convene a dialogue among the different expressions of the ELCA (synods, Churchwide units, congregations, pastors, local leaders, and others) to explore and reflect upon Latino ministries in both sides of the border between the United States and Mexico (area that actually is the main entryway into the United States for undocumented Latino immigrants), in order to develop a coherent strategy—incorporating the needs of the population, for instance, the immigration issue—which is inclusive, incorporating the various institutions and denominations in the region, and allowing mutual coordination and collaboration.
 - b. Motivate the Latino community to participate in movements that advocate for immigrants' rights, periodically holding informational forums that create consciousness within the Latino community about immigration problems, teaching about those rights and how to advocate for those in the margins of society, and indicating others manners of community participation.
7. Identifying and developing needed resources and materials— in Spanish or bilingual—that support the resources and alliances previously mentioned, by creating, translating, or adapting materials in different formats (print, digital, multimedia), to meet the needs where applicable. To achieve this, the Unit for Global Mission and the Director for Latino Ministries in DMU will work with the translation coordinator in the Unit for Mission Advancement in order to successfully support these initiatives.



Leadership

This area encompasses identification, development, and care of leaders of all ages and identities— cultural or gender—and of all people, whether they are in the official rosters of the ELCA or lay persons. Its goal will be to explore and strengthen their Lutheran identity, tend to their emotional needs, and provide them with tools to achieve efficient performance in their individual functions. In order to accomplish this, we suggest:

1. Under the responsibility of the Director for Latino Ministries and the Lutheran Association of Latino Ministries, in collaboration with the Lay Academies Program, DMU Leadership Team, and DEMs: Coordinating the development of lay leaders in church and community, by:
 - a. Promoting, implementing, and expanding the Lutheran Latino Academy of the ELCA (*Academia Luterana Latina de la ELCA*),⁵ under DMU.
 - b. Promoting a methodology that allows congregations to share resources and models. The website of the Association of Latino Ministries, ELCA,⁶ can be used to achieve this.
 - c. Continuing and strengthening the collaboration between seminaries, synods, Latino community and the Association of Latino Ministries in order to establish a virtual educational platform that will provide training to leaders of the Latino Lutheran community in all areas of God's mission throughout the Church.
 - d. Promoting and making accessible—to pastors and lay people— appropriate resources for identifying and developing leadership.
 - e. Training leaders to recognize and develop their gifts in the fight against racism and other forms of oppression.
2. With the participation of Synodical Candidacy Committees, and in consultation with DMU's Candidacy Team and the Director for Latino Ministries, identifying and supporting leaders involved in the ministry formation process, by:
 - a. Providing opportunities for support and interaction (mentoring, financial support, mental health resources, and networks of communication) to persons in the candidacy process.
 - b. Equipping and training candidates to the ministry to empower them in confronting institutionalized and internalized racism.
 - c. Providing the tools and information regarding the candidacy and call processes in Spanish.
 - d. Creating openness in communication for persons in the candidacy process so that they may advocate for justice, thus generating institutional change.

5 At the time this revision was written, the platform used is LEAD, Houston, TX, www.waytolead.org

6 As this revision was written, the Association of Latino Ministries was developing their webpage: www.amh-iela.org

3. Under the responsibility of the Director for Latino Ministries and the Association for Latino Ministries, and in collaboration with DMU's Leadership Team, coordinating the development and care of members of the ministry, by:
 - a. Developing programs and tools in Spanish relating to all areas of pastoral ministry (family, community, culture) in order that they may be implemented in events, such as retreats.
 - b. Creating spaces for members of the ministry—serving in Latino or bilingual communities—in order that they receive accompaniment, new skills, new knowledge, attention to their emotional being, and faith care.
 - c. Developing a list of topics and institutions to develop those skills contextually, in order to allow members of the ministry and mission developers to have clear options for continuing their theological education, acquire new skills for the ministry, or—simply—satisfy their curiosity regarding certain areas.
 - d. Creating spaces that encourage camaraderie, such as support communities, in order to provide attention and care to each community leader in charge of a congregation.
 - e. Exploring the possibility of developing and implementing a coaching program in two stages: the first one, directed towards Mission Developers and Church Redevelopers and the second one, to all rostered leaders.

4. Under the direction of the Director of Faith Practices in DMU's Leadership Team, in conjunction with the Director for Latino Ministries, creating a culture of healthy lay and clergy leaders, nurturing their spiritual growth with faith practices,⁷ and promoting a healthy and holistic life, by:
 - a. Offering workshops about *Faith Practices* in the ELCA.
 - b. Encouraging congregations to organize a ministry of well-being that will periodically include "Healthy Sundays."
 - c. Promoting marriage encounters and counseling.
 - d. Promoting "*Story Matters*"⁸ workshops in Spanish.
 - e. Developing contextual resources in Spanish based on the Book of Faith.



⁷ Faith Practices, ELCA, DM www.elca.org/Our-Work/Faith-Practices.

⁸ *Ibid*

Development of Relevant and Contextual Congregations and Missions

As a community, we understand and recognize God's reconciling work in the world. Therefore, we yearn to respond obediently to God's call to participate in that mission.⁹ Based in our historical, cultural, and religious experience, we wish that the formation and strengthening of our faith communities reflect the following values:

- a. In Community: connected to the different performers participating in the development of communities, solidarity, fully inclusive, and committed with the marginalized and vulnerable.
- b. Contextual: culturally, socially, and racially diverse; intergenerational, and ecumenical; understanding the particularities of each area where a mission is being developed in order to broadcast God's revelation in a clear and comprehensible manner.
- c. Multiplying: faithful to our calling from God—in Scripture and through our Baptism—to work in the proclamation of God's Kingdom of Peace and Justice; encouraging, equipping, and giving opportunities for the full participation of laity,
- d. Prophetic: maintaining a constant and fluid dialogue with society, assuming responsibility for clearly announcing not only the standards of God's love, justice, and compassion, but also God's Good News of liberation, hope, restoration, and reconciliation; denouncing racism, prejudice, discrimination and all kinds of injustice, advocating for the oppressed and the voiceless.
- e. Relevant: recognizing in its history and actuality the permanent reforming activity of the Holy Spirit; accepting the new order (Kairos) that it brings and taking up its transforming message.

The Latino community commissions the synods to implement this area of ministry, and we request that they take into consideration the participation of local Latino leadership. DEMs and Director for Latino Ministries will maintain continuous communication, by way of reports and updates, as expressions of mutual responsibility.

Also, the Latino Strategy Team and DMU will coordinate efforts to encourage integrating the Latino community into the work of synods and DEMs.

As a suggestion, we recommend that synods:

1. Create synodical advisory groups to generate and evaluate proposals for establishing new Latino ministries, renewing existing Latino congregations, and promoting creative forms for sustainability of Latino ministries.
2. Give to these advisory groups the responsibility of observing the growth of the Latino population in the United States, in order to direct mission efforts towards the areas where they are most required and/or wherever there is a larger opening to these efforts.
3. Encourage the development of Latino ministries of Word and Sacrament that lead to service and that can:
 - a. Contextualize evangelism and social justice ministry in their communities.
 - b. Contribute to the elimination of institutionalized racism and to the healing of internalized racism, particularly in Latino communities, and, in general, in ethnic communities.
 - c. Respond to the reality of new Latino generations: multicultural, multiracial, multilingual, migrants, and immigrants.
 - d. Be inclusive, respecting each person's human dignity—regardless of their sexual orientation, race, nationality, gender, age, social or economic standing, etc—accepting the contribution of their gifts, talents, and Christian vocations.
 - e. Practice gender equality in all its aspects.
 - f. Intentionally reach out to Latino persons of divergent social-economic position.
 - g. Encourage ecumenical mission work with our Full Communion partners.
 - h. Use the talents in ministry of lay leaders in order to develop new congregations, following ELCA guidelines.

⁹ 2 Corinthians 5: 1-20

Presence and Participation

This area has to do with the participation of the Latino Lutheran community in all three expressions of the church. In order to achieve this, we suggest:

1. Fostering dialogue—at all levels—about the Latino community's contribution to Lutheran identity in the United States and the Caribbean. We propose to meet this objective between 2016 and 2017. This will be achieved by:
 - a. Requesting that DMU Leadership Team convene a group of theologians, educators, pastors and lay persons in order to develop a guide that will facilitate the beginning of this dialogue. This guide could include, for instance, homiletics, liturgy, popular religiosity, etc.
 - b. Encouraging the inclusion of the topic (Latino community's contribution to Lutheran identity in the United States and the Caribbean) in synodical teams, which would include synodical councils and staff.
 - c. Requesting that the Presiding Bishop of the ELCA include the topic in Conference of Bishops meetings.
 - d. Directing the Association of Latino Ministries and the Director for Latino Ministries to distribute the guide (Appendix A) among all Latino and Multicultural congregations existing or under development.
2. Including the social-cultural and theological contribution of the Latino community in the formation of all ELCA leadership. This will be achieved by requesting that the Leadership Team of DMU make known—to theological institutions advisory groups—programs developed regarding the social, cultural and theological contribution of the Latino community. This can be achieved in special events for synods, seminaries, and the Conference of Bishops and developing a global course of Latino perspective.
3. Encouraging theological dialogue about Lutheran Latino identity and spirituality in all expressions of the church, by:
 - a. Asking DMU Leadership Team to, along with the Association of Latino Ministries, resume theological consultations regarding Latino Lutheran identity and spirituality.
 - b. Proposing the inclusion of the topic in the curriculum of all our seminaries and universities.
4. Encouraging the participation of the Latino Lutheran community in all expressions of the church in the following manner:
 - a. Asking DMU Leadership Team to include training programs, for example, a course or workshop on cultural identity—in the ELCA Latino Academy—to assist the Latino Lutheran community in recognizing its value and capacity to collaborate within the church.
 - b. Requesting synodical DEMs to train Latino Lutheran communities—by means of workshops, conferences, and Spanish brochures—about the roles of Churchwide and synods.
 - c. Asking Unit Directors, the Office of the Presiding Bishop, and synods to encourage the active presence of Lutheran Latino leaders in non-Latino churches with Latino membership, in order to have them participate in committees, synodical and national councils.
 - d. Encouraging the participation of the Latino Lutheran community—through the Association of Latino Ministries, in conjunction with the other ethnic groups of the ELCA—in the life of the church (in its three expressions) in order to strengthen its presence and full participation.
 - e. Supporting the participation of Lutheran Latinas—through Latina networks—in the three expressions of the church. Also, encouraging their leadership training and development.
 - f. Encouraging representation and participation of Latino adults, young adults, youth, children, elderly, LGBT, and differently-abled in the three expressions of the church by means of training geared to pastors and leaders.
 - g. Requesting that the Director for Latino Ministries set up national committees for the development of networks comprising Latino Lutheran men, elderly, and LGBT. 2016 will be the deadline for establishing these networks, proposing that each network have at least 6 representatives. These geographical areas should have representatives: Puerto Rico, New York, Illinois, Texas, California, and Florida.
 - h. Suggesting Latino leadership representation in the executive management area of ELCA related organizations, such as Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services, Lutheran Social Services, and Lutheran Disaster Relief.

Appendix A

Companion Synod Relationships/Relaciones con Sínodos Compañeros

Argentina/Uruguay (Iglesia Evangélica Luterana Unida): Nebraska Synod (4A); Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod (7E)

Bolivia: (Iglesia Evangélica Luterana Boliviana) Montana Synod (1F)

Brazil: (Igreja Evangelica de Confissao Luterana no Brasil) Southern Ohio Synod (6F)

Chile: (Iglesia Evangélica Luterana en Chile) Western Iowa Synod (5E); Indiana-Kentucky Synod (6C)

Colombia: (Iglesia Evangélica Luterana de Colombia) Southeastern Minnesota Synod (3I); South Carolina Synod (9C)

Costa Rica: (Iglesia Luterana Costarricense) North Carolina Synod (9B); Southwestern Texas Synod (4E)

Cuba: (Iglesia Evangélica de Confesión Luterana de Cuba) Florida-Bahamas Synod (9E)

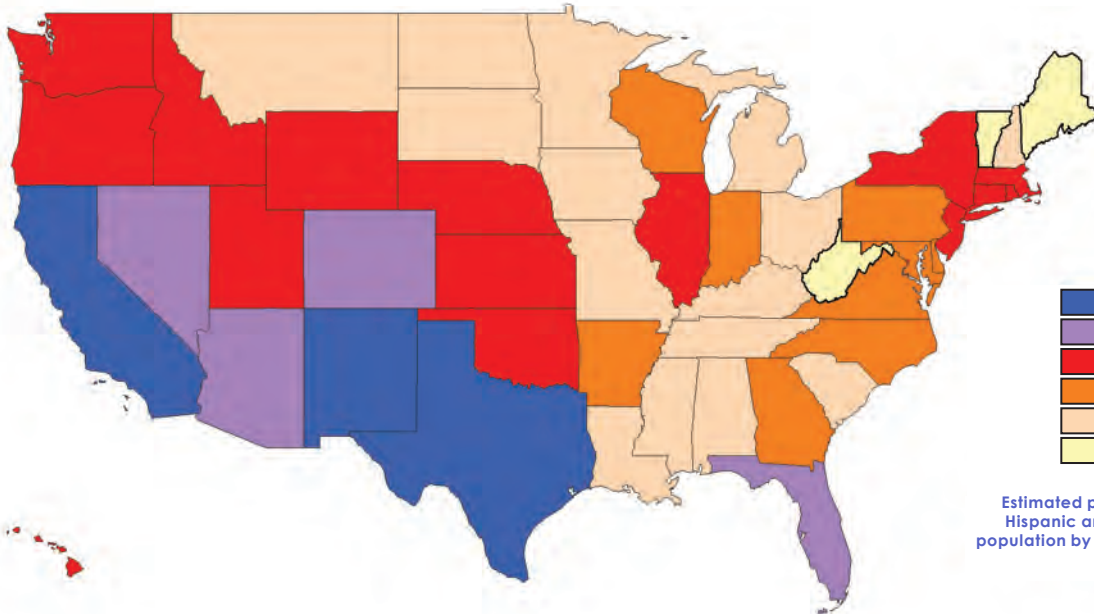
El Salvador: (Iglesia Luterana Salvadoreña) Metropolitan Washington D.C. Synod (8G); Greater Milwaukee Synod (5J); Sierra Pacific Synod (2A); Southwest California Synod (2B)

Guatemala: (Iglesia Luterana Agustina de Guatemala) St. Paul Area Synod (3H); Southeastern Synod (9D)

Honduras: (Iglesia Cristiana Luterana de Honduras) New England Synod (7B); Northeastern Minnesota Synod (3E); North/West Lower Michigan Synod (6B)

Nicaragua: (Iglesia Luterana de Nicaragua Fe y Esperanza) South Dakota Synod (3C)

Perú: (Iglesia Luterana Evangélica Peruana) Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod (4F); La Crosse Area Synod (5L)



Estimated percent of Hispanic and Latino population by state in 2015



