

ENGAGING FAITH COMMUNITIES: LATINO PROTESTANT LEADERS

Please note: These are generalizations. As with all groups, commonalities and differences may exist among individuals.

- Religion Called:** Protestantism, evangelical Christianity/evangelicalism, Pentecostalism, or denomination name
- Adherents Consider Themselves:** Cristiano, Protestante and are called Cristianos, evangélicos, or Pentecostales
- House of Worship:** Church in English, Iglesia in Spanish
- First Point of Contact:** Pastor and governing committee
- Religious Leader:** Minister/pastor
- Spoken Direct Address:** Use “Reverend” or “Pastor” depending on denomination
- Physical Interaction:** Handshakes, hugs, kisses on cheek generally O.K. across sexes

HOUSE OF WORSHIP

- Most Latino Protestant congregations call their place of worship a church. Churches can be small storefront locations or large-scale campuses with multiple buildings. Many houses of worship serve both English-speaking and Spanish-speaking congregations in the same building with separate services for each congregation. Some congregations may worship in members' homes. Many congregations, especially those in urban areas, have had to move locations frequently due to expiration of leases or increasing costs of rent. Some may have limited signage or temporary signs posted only on Sundays.

RELIGIOUS LEADERS

Ordained/Commissioned/Licensed Leaders

- Common terms for Protestant leaders include pastor or reverend.
- Many Latino Protestant denominations have no gender qualifications for leadership roles or participation in worship. Some limit leadership roles to men while most Pentecostal churches and some other denominations affirm women in leadership.

Lay Leaders

- In many Latino churches the pastor is a layperson.
- Includes lay governing bodies such as a board of directors, parish council, elders, or vestry.

POINTS OF CONTACT

- Local:** Local congregations are often unaffiliated and led by a part-time pastor. Some may have an elected governing committee. First point of contact at local level should be both pastor and governing committee.
- Regional:** Unaffiliated congregations may be associated with a local network or association (sometimes difficult to identify).
- National:** Varies by denomination (usually a national judicatory body or association e.g. La Red).

NVOAD MEMBERSHIP AND CORE CAPABILITIES IN DISASTER

- National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (NVOAD) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, membership based organization that serves as the forum where organizations share knowledge and resources throughout the disaster cycle. FEMA DSA team members should check with their VAL to determine whether local or regional VOADs exist in their operational area. While there are no Latino-specific National VOAD members, many Protestant denominations significant numbers of Latino congregations have NVOAD affiliates. See the Protestant Leaders Tip Sheet for more information.
- Consider whether megachurches (over 2000 members) are located in affected area as they are likely to have social service programs. Many smaller congregations are involved in day-to-day social needs of their members such as clothing, food, health care, and housing.

ETIQUETTE QUICK TIPS

Greeting

- When introducing yourself to a religious leader, use formal religious titles unless instructed otherwise. Congregation members of baptized age may greet each other as “hermano” (brother) or “hermana” (sister).

Physical Interaction

- Shaking hands, hugging, and kissing on the cheek is common in most Latino Protestant denominations. In certain denominations it may not be readily accepted for members of the opposite sex to shake hands or embrace.

Other

- Some Latino Protestant leaders may not speak English or be comfortable conversing in Spanish. Dialects vary.
- When entering a Protestant house of worship, shoes are generally left on but men should remove hats or caps. Other than this practice, traditions around dress codes for both sanctuary spaces and office spaces vary dramatically according to culture and geographical region of the country. In general, there are no rules about what one may wear or not wear, however, “Sunday best” attire is expected in many churches.
- Ask before participating in worship services. Guests may be invited to participate in some worship activities. If not a member, limit participation in these activities (e.g. taking communion or healings) unless invited. Ushers can help with customs, dress, and etiquette.

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GOVERNANCE / JUDICATORY

- Governance structures range from small congregations that are completely self-governing to networks of small churches that affiliate with larger megachurches. The single largest denomination among Latino Protestants is Assemblies of God. It has 14 “Hispanic Districts” served by the liaison Office of Hispanic Relations to the national office. Other Latino Pentecostal denominations include: Apostolic Assembly, Concilio Latino Americano de Iglesias Cristianas (CLADIC), El Concilio Latinoamericano Internacional de la Iglesia de Dios Pentecostal de Nueva York (CLANY) and the Asamblea de Iglesias Cristianas. Some Latino churches are linked to denominations from the charismatic renewal movement, e.g. Vineyard and Calvary Chapel. Other denominations such as Adventists, American Baptists, Methodists, Nazarenes, and Southern Baptists have a substantial number of Latino churches.

ABOUT LATINO PROTESTANT CONGREGATIONS

- Note on usage of “Latino”: The term “Latino” is used in this Tip Sheet as a term inclusive of both female and male disaster survivors of Latin American origin or ancestry residing in the U.S. While this term is used here, it is preferable to refer to each disaster survivor as he/she refers to himself/herself, whether it be through the word Latino/Latina, Hispanic, or a term specific to the survivor’s country of origin (e.g. Boriqua - Puerto Rico, Chicano/a - Mexico, Cubano/a - Cuba, Dominicano/a - Dominican Republic, etc.).
- In the United States, about 68% of Latinos identify as Roman Catholic and 20% identify as Protestant. The percentage of Latinos that are Protestant is growing. Congregants’ countries of origin may include those from Central or South America, Mexico, and the Caribbean (Cuba, Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico). More than half of Latino Protestants (57%) identify as charismatic or Pentecostal. While many continue to worship in Spanish, others attend non-Latino Protestant churches.
- Many Latino Protestants also continue to place importance on indigenous traditions such as Santería (Cuban Americans and other groups) and Guadelupism (Mexican American Roman Catholics and some Protestant converts). Basic tenets vary between mainline protestant and evangelical protestant denominations, but generally include the following: Assertion of personal relationship with God through Christ, study of the Bible by laypersons, freedom of conscience on matters, and variety in worship styles. Belief that Jesus of Nazareth is God Incarnate. The birth, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus are definitive. Nature of God is Trinitarian (Father, Son, Holy Spirit). The Holy Spirit is important to Protestants, but receives more emphasis from Pentecostals who believe in its spiritual gifts such as divine healing, prophesying, and speaking in tongues.

LOGISTICS

- Many Latino Protestant leaders are bi-vocational and may have jobs outside of their pastoral duties.
- Some congregations serve undocumented immigrants or mixed-documentation households. DSA teams should explain FEMA’s role, limitations of program eligibility and provide referrals to whole community partners.

MEETING LOGISTICS AND SCHEDULING

Scheduling and Holidays

- Sunday is the Sabbath for most Latino Protestants (Saturdays for Seventh Day Adventists). On this day, members of particular Latino communities gather from all parts of a given city. With good relationship building and communication, pastors and their leadership may accommodate hosting a public agency if it is significant to the well-being of the community. Holidays include:
- Semana Santa (Holy Week): leads up to Easter; begins with Palm Sunday (recalling Jesus’ return to Jerusalem); includes Maundy Thursday (recalling Jesus’ institution of the Holy Communion during his last meal with his disciples) and Good Friday (recalling Jesus’ crucifixion).
- Pascua (Easter): most important season in the Christian year celebrating the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.
- Pentecostés (Pentecost): commemorating the receipt of the Holy Spirit by the nascent Christian community, fifty days after Jesus’ Resurrection. This holiday is recognized by many and is a major celebration for some.
- Navidad (Christmas): celebration of the birth of Jesus as God incarnate.
- All Protestants follow the liturgical calendar, with levels of observance for the seasons of Advent and Lent.
- Some congregations celebrate “Homecoming” (in late summer, usually).
- Thanksgiving Day (a U.S. national holiday) is celebrated as a religious holiday by some Protestant churches.

DRESS

- Many pastors wear attire similar to lay members—varies from casual to business casual to “Sunday best” attire.
- Religious leaders with a denominational affiliation may wear clothing prescribed by their denomination or a variety of other ecclesiastical clothes based on personal choice or understanding of their denomination’s historical preferences.
- In some Latino Protestant churches, lay females may choose to wear a head covering (“Velo” or “Mantilla”) as part of a conservative style of dress. In some churches that use velos, women can take leadership roles if wearing velos.

FOOD

- Few general restrictions or requirements; check with individual leaders. Some denominations do take very seriously laws of fasting and abstinence, refraining from eating meat on certain days and limiting the quantity of food on other days. During the season of Lent, some denominations are required to abstain from eating meat on Fridays, but may eat fish. Most Latino evangelicals choose not to drink alcohol.



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