

## The Four Latino Trends Changing the Church in America

The current immigration debate succeeded in removing the grave clothes from one of America's best kept secrets, the Hispanic Evangelical Church. According to one of the top Hispanic Evangelical scholars, Dr. Gaston Espinosa, 37 percent of the U.S. Latino population (14.2 million) self-identifies as "born-again" or evangelical. This figure includes Catholic charismatics, who constitute 22 percent of U.S. Latino Catholics. The Latino Church is the fastest growing segment of the United States Church. If the current migratory and birth rate trends stay constant, by the middle of this century, the majority of Born Again Christians in America will be of Hispanic descent. As a result, it is of the utmost importance for the entire church to understand the Hispanic Evangelical ethos and analyze the trends within such body. The emerging trends in the Hispanic Church have the potential of transforming not only the Latino community but the entire American born again family. The three trends to consider are ; The women driven mega church movement, Hispanic lead multi cultural church planting , and Hispanic Pentecostals and the social Gospel.

First, I wholeheartedly believe the next Joel Osteens, Bill Hybels, Rick Warrens, TD Jakes, and Eddie Longs of the church will have last names Garcia, Gonzalez, Rivera, Maldonado, and Velez. The Hispanic Church already has mega churches throughout the nation. From Miami, Florida, Pastor Guillermo Maldonado pastors an 8,000 member thriving congregation. In addition, Pastor Gilbert Velez, Bishop Steve Perea, Rev. Danny DeLeon and others lead churches with thousands of adherents. Yet, what makes the Latino church unique in it's Mega Church phenomena is that the culture universally known for it's machismo is ironically producing Joel Osteens with names such as Lucy Saavedra, Yolanda Eden, and Wanda Rolon. In other words, the Mega Church Phenomena in the Latino Community is being co-driven by women. Undoubtedly, the question arises, how can a culture known to restrict the role of women in the cultural context reconcile with women as the senior leaders of thriving congregations? "Hispanic Christians value one thing over the cultural dynamics and stereotypes of the people. We value the anointing. We value the presence and ministry of The Holy Spirit. More important than gender is the testimony of God. Our people will follow whoever is carrying the mantle regardless of gender," stated Dr. Sergio Navarrette, Assemblies of God Southern Pacific Latin Superintendent. In the state of Nevada, one of the largest Hispanic Churches is lead by Pastor Lucy Saavedra. Pastor Lucy just finished the successful purchase of a multi million dollar complex. In a recent meeting in Las Vegas, Lucy stated that one of her goals is to see Hispanic women pastor mega churches in every major urban center in America. Case in point; while many in the non-ethnic evangelical community still debate the role of women in ministry, the Latino church is leading the way in a progressive facilitation of female pastors. "Hispanic denominations and fellowships are more open to female

executive leadership than many of our non ethnic brothers and sisters. I predict we will see female leadership of our denominations before others do. “, stated Rev. Felix Posos, Chairman of the Latin American Theological Seminary. At the end of day, the evangelical church in America may well see women in all roles and positions in the church thanks in good part to the Hispanic church looking beyond “machismo” and embracing biblical equality.

The second emerging trend in the Hispanic Evangelical church is the deliberate commencement of church services and church plants in other languages other than Spanish. Not for the sole purpose of preserving second and third generation adherents but rather to attract non Hispanics and present the Hispanic Evangelical version of "Church" to all. “There is a lot of trepidation in the Church community on whether we have gone to far in the seeker friendly presentation of the Gospel. Hispanic born Again believers are deliberate about the presentation.”