

Preparing The Way: Hispanic Ministry And Community Transformation In Marshalltown, Iowa

Anne C. Woodrick

Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Criminology
University of Northern Iowa

ABSTRACT: Recent anthropological studies of new immigrant destination communities recognize Marshalltown, Iowa, as one of the unusually successful U.S. towns in its accommodation of recent Latino immigrants. This paper examines the crucial role that Rev. John Allen of Elim Lutheran Church played in establishing the foundation for a Latino community identity and forging an integrated and diverse Marshalltown community. One person, with a vision and passion for his work and respect and empathy for others, made the difference. However, Hispanic ministry can never be static, and over time others more effectively built upon Allen's foundation. Hispanic ministry is a process that must evolve in order to effectively respond to changing social, cultural, and advocacy needs of the immigrants it serves.

Prologue

The Rev. John Allen, pastor of Elim Lutheran Church (E.L.C.A.) in Marshalltown, Iowa, and his family were

enjoying a Chinese dinner in Wong's Restaurant a few weeks before Christmas. Their after-dinner conversation engaged a couple of young Latino men who were bussing tables. Until this moment Allen had not really had a chance to speak with some of the Latino newcomers who had been arriving in Marshalltown during the past year. An inquisitive Allen discovered that none of the men had plans to celebrate Christmas in church. The Latinos explained that they wished to attend mass, but wanted to participate in a Spanish mass. All worship services in local churches were in English. In response to their dilemma, Allen invited them and any other Latinos to a Spanish mass at Elim on Christmas Day afternoon.

On Christmas Day, 1990, Rev. John Allen, assisted by a translator, celebrated a Spanish Christmas liturgy for 15 Latinos, and began an 18-month Hispanic ministry in Marshalltown. The Latino congregation grew to more than 250 registered families. A choir was formed. Baptisms and First Communion were performed. Padre Juan, as John Allen was affectionately called, and the mostly Mexican immigrants worked together to create a dynamic Latino congregation. Many Elim parishioners were supportive and appreciative of the new ministry.

However, the Elim Hispanic ministry also had its challenges. A few vocal individuals were not supportive of Allen's ministry to the Mexicans. Catholics worshipping in a Lutheran church raised concerns among Anglo-Lutherans and Catholics alike. And the expanding Latino congregation expressed to the Elim Church Council their desire that a Spanish-speaking priest be hired by the local Catholic Church.

In July 1992, the Archdiocese of Dubuque appointed Father Paul Ouder Kirk as the Hispanic Minister of St. Mary's Catholic Church in Marshalltown. This was the first Hispanic ministry appointment in the Archdiocese. That summer John Allen accepted a call to a church in Wisconsin and was to leave

town in early August. The two clergy overlapped a month in Marshalltown. Father Paul attended the Spanish masses held at Elim, and the priests worked together to plan Padre Juan's final Spanish worship service. On a Sunday afternoon in late July, Rev. John Allen began his last Spanish mass at Elim. Immediately following the benediction, Padre Juan and Father Paul, dressed in full vestments, the entire Latino congregation, the choir and guitar players, and the statue of the Virgen de Guadalupe processed from Elim down the sidewalks of Marshalltown to St. Mary's Catholic Church. In the basement of St. Mary's Rev. John Allen passed his Hispanic ministry to Father Paul and bade goodbye to his Latino friends.

Introduction

Like many new immigrant destination communities throughout rural America, Marshalltown, Iowa, has changed dramatically since 1989 as more than 6,000 Latino immigrants have moved to this rural Midwestern town to seek their vision of the American dream. Mexican storefronts, boisterous *quinceañera* celebrations, bilingual educational programs, and pastel painted homes are examples of how the social, cultural and physical landscapes have changed. However, rapid ethnic diversification is not an easy process. At times it can be quite divisive and painful for all involved. Newcomers, long time residents, community organizations, and local leadership all are challenged to find ways to communicate, understand, and work together. In the social milieu of the rural Midwest, Latino integration into local communities is particularly challenging. Language and cultural barriers are evident. Discrimination by Anglo residents, often based on stereotypes and false information, exists. The "transient" character of a primarily Mexican work force, tied to high labor turnover rates and undocumented status, compounds the problem of intergroup relations. Re-

search on the influx of Latinos into America's heartland in the early 1990s emphasizes the "peripheralization" of immigrants in local communities due to economic, social, and political marginalization of Latinos by Anglo residents and state organizations (Cantu 1995; Naples 1994).

Now after more than a decade of Latino settlement, recent anthropological studies of new immigrant destination communities in the United States recognize not only the continuing challenges and difficulties that influence intergroup relations, but also the "good practices" that have emerged as old time residents and newcomers learn to work together (Zúñiga and Hernández-León 2005). Marshalltown, Iowa, is recognized as one of the unusually successful U.S. towns in its accommodation of recent Latino immigrants (Conte 2002; Frese 2002; Grey and Baker 2002; Griffith 2002, 2004; Grey and Woodrick 2002, 2005).¹ In fact, "most citizens of Marshalltown have come to accept Latino immigrants as a permanent part of their landscape" (Griffith 2004:4).

The recent analyses of Marshalltown mask the rather humble beginning of the Hispanic ministry at Elim Lutheran Church under the guidance of Rev. John Allen by highlighting programs and activities that developed after Allen's ministry. Reference to Allen's ministry is either neglected or anecdotal.² However, what is acknowledged is the significant contribution that churches and church leaders have made in the integration of newcomers and established residents in Marshalltown. St. Mary's Catholic Church and the First Baptist Church (American Baptist Church, U.S.A.), along with other faith-based organizations and programs including the Salvation Army, the Food Box, the House of Compassion [homeless shelter], and Lutheran Social Services of Iowa, are recognized as playing a vital role in welcoming newcomers to Marshalltown (Grey et al. 2001). Griffith (2002, 2004) identifies St. Mary's and the First Baptist Church, along with their Hispanic ministry staffs, as two key organizations that make the integration of Latinos into

Marshalltown work. Latinos themselves identify the church as the principal local institution in assisting them adapt to Marshalltown (Griffith 2004:55).

A question remains, though, about how the initial efforts of John Allen's Hispanic ministry influenced not only later Hispanic ministry activities, but also the broader community initiatives connected to Marshalltown's success in accommodating Latino newcomers. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the ministry of John Allen in relation to the role of church and other faith-based organizations in effecting community formation and transformation in the context of rapid ethnic diversification. The term community will be used in two ways. The first definition is in reference to a Latino community identity that forms after the first Latinos arrived in Marshalltown. The other concept of community refers to Marshalltown as a community in transformation in which established residents and newcomers increasingly interact and work toward similar goals.³

Research Methods

Stimulated by the call for ethnographic inquiry about recent immigrant congregations (Warner 1996), the author initiated a research project in the summer of 1997 to investigate the role of religion in the creation of community identity among Latino immigrants in Iowa. This ongoing ethnographic investigation focuses on Catholic Hispanic Ministries in the Archdiocese of Dubuque and the Diocese of Sioux City in Iowa. Four local Hispanic ministry programs have been the primary foci of research. One of these is St. Mary's Catholic Church in Marshalltown. Research data from Marshalltown is based upon open-ended interviews with ministry personnel from Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist and Baptist churches ($N=8$), structured and open-ended interviews with Latino immigrants (Marshalltown, $N=20$), and participant observation of Catholic religious

activities (masses, prayer groups, processions, and reflection groups) and broader community activities (e.g., Marshalltown Diversity Committee, Fourth of July celebrations). Interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed. Interviews with Latino immigrants were conducted in Spanish. Rev. John Allen was interviewed at his home in Wisconsin in 1999. The following year, six Anglo community members who knew and/or worked with Allen were interviewed. Field notes that record participant observation activities and casual conversations with immigrants and Anglos, and newspaper articles from the MARSHALLTOWN TIMES-REPUBLICAN and the DES MOINES REGISTRAR, are indexed and filed as research data.

In addition to the traditional ethnographic methodology outlined above, research data about new immigrants in Marshalltown and other towns in Iowa comes out of the author's work with the New Iowans Program at the University of Northern Iowa. From 2001 to 2004 the author served as co-director of the New Iowans Program and worked alongside program director Mark Grey to help Anglo community leaders in Iowa better understand the new Latino immigrants in their communities. We have worked extensively in Marshalltown with both Anglo community leaders and organizations and the Latino immigrant population. Our work is best described as nontraditional as we actively strive to bridge the social-cultural gap between long-time Anglo residents and the newcomers through innovative programming (Conte 2002; Grey and Baker 2002; Grey and Woodrick 2002, 2005), the publication of guides for the Anglo community on "Welcoming New Iowans" (e.g., Grey 2001; Woodrick and Grey 2002), and workshop/seminar presentations. Work with the New Iowans Program provided the author seven opportunities to make week-long trips to Villachuato, Michoacán, between 2001 and 2005. This is the primary Mexican sending community among recent Latino immigrants living in Marshalltown.

Latino Immigration into Iowa

Recent statistics, published by the Pew Hispanic Center (Passel 2005), summarize what is becoming increasingly apparent: the Hispanic population throughout the United States is growing at an unprecedented rate, and Mexicans comprise the majority of the Hispanic population. As of March 2004, it was estimated that 11.2 million Mexicans currently reside in the United States. Of these, more than six million are undocumented. Passel (2005) estimates that between 80 and 85% of migration from Mexico into the United States in recent years is undocumented. Another relevant statistic is the redistribution of Mexican immigrants away from the Big 6 settlement states (California, Texas, Florida, New York, Illinois, Arizona) and into completely new destinations throughout America.

In response to the availability of jobs in agriculture and especially in meatpacking plants, Latino immigration has increased dramatically throughout the Midwest since 1990. In the decade of the 1990s the Hispanic population in Iowa increased by 153%, ranking Iowa 11th in the nation in percentage increase of resident Hispanics. The 2004 estimated Iowa population is 2,954,451, and an official count of Hispanic residents is 91,588, or 3.1% of the state population.⁴ In 1990 Hispanics accounted for 1.2% of Iowa's residents. Most researchers believe that the current population figure for Hispanics is well below the actual number of Hispanics living in the state. Legal status and a general mistrust of government more than likely affect census data collection. Passel (2005) estimates the undocumented Mexican population in Iowa to be between 55,000 and 85,000. Given this figure, it is likely that the total Hispanic population in Iowa is over 100,000. Iowa's Hispanic population is primarily Mexican. According to the 2000 Census, 76% of Hispanics in Iowa are from Mexico.

Although the Hispanic population in Iowa is well below Hispanic population figures in gateway cities such as Los An-

geles, Chicago, New York and Houston, the local demographic changes occurring throughout the state are noteworthy. Ninety-eight out of the 99 counties in Iowa had an increase in Hispanic residents from 1990 to 2000. In particular, towns associated with new and/or expanding meat processing facilities have experienced more than 1000% increases in Hispanic residents. These demographic changes are significant, especially in Iowan counties/towns with relatively low population figures. For example, in Conesville, located in southeastern Iowa near an IBP pork-processing plant, 59 percent of the 424 residents are Hispanic (McCormick 2001).

Marshalltown is the county seat and largest town in Marshall County. It is an agricultural and industrial town located in central Iowa. At the turn of the 20th century Marshalltown, like Iowa in general, was settled by primarily German, Irish and Scandinavian homesteaders. German, Irish and Norwegian remain the three largest ethnic affiliations in Marshalltown. A few Southeast Asian refugees settled into town during the 1970s, and there is an extremely small African-American population. The recent increase in Latino residents in town has been dramatic and significantly alters the local demographic profile.

Some of the Latino workforce initially came to Marshalltown and Swift's hog processing plant just by happenstance. According to one informant, he ended up working at Swift's in 1989 because he and several other men had traveled from California to the Midwest to detassel corn. When the detasseling work came to an end, they learned of meatpacking jobs in Marshalltown and opted to remain in Iowa. A few men had families who joined them shortly thereafter. These early Latino pioneers from California's Central Valley communicated to others about jobs in the Midwest. Meatpacking paid relatively high wages, the cost of living in Iowa was lower than California, and, overall, the tranquil quality of life was attractive. Soon more Latinos from California, Texas, Illinois, Mexico and other parts of the United States and Latin America were moving to

Marshalltown. Early on, Swift bused young Latino men from Waterloo and Des Moines to Marshalltown (Griffith 2002:6).

In 1990, Marshalltown had 248 Hispanics, or 0.9% of the town's 25,178 residents. Young, single males were the majority of the early Hispanic population. Throughout the 1990s more and more Latinos began to move to Marshalltown. One of the significant reasons for the increase in Latino population was the networking that developed between the residents of Villachuato, Michoacán, Mexico and the Swift plant. By 1998 approximately 500 production workers at Swift's, just under a third of the entire production line, were Villachuatans, who currently comprise close to one-half of the total resident Latino population (Grey and Woodrick 2002). By 2000, the Hispanic population in Marshalltown was officially 3,265, or 12.6% of the total population of 26,009. The local chief of police estimates the number of Latino residents to be closer to 6,000, or as high as 20% of the local population (Frese 2002). A 2002 sample of Latino parishioners ($N=707$) at St. Mary's Catholic Church reports that the majority of Latinos (99%) are from Mexico, representing 18 Mexican states and the Federal District. More than two-thirds of the sample (69%) are from three states in west central Mexico: Michoacán, Jalisco, and Guanajuato. Villachuatans ($N=152$) comprise 21.5% of the entire sample.

Early Latino Immigration Experiences and the Responses of Faith-Based Organizations

Sister Carol Besch was the first to organize a Hispanic ministry around Hampton, Iowa, in 1997. A year or so prior to her arrival, Latino immigrants had been settling in and around the Hampton area. I asked her in our initial interview (1999) what she had accomplished during her first two years on the job. Laughing, her quick response was: "Surfacing a heck of a lot of Hispanics." Sister Carol went on to explain

how isolated and alone many of the Latino individuals and families are when they first arrive in a new destination. Immigrants told her how strange everything was, and that "everything seemed to be out of control." In the Hampton area Latinos remained largely invisible until they began attending Spanish masses and other church activities. "The church has been like for them a meeting place...to get to know other Hispanics." Sister Carol's social and religious ministry has been invaluable for Latino immigrants. But churches and/or other community organizations, especially at the beginning of Latino immigration to the state, have not always been receptive to newcomers.

Early studies of midwestern meatpacking towns indicate that churches were not very responsive to Latinos. Lowman (1996) states that the role of the church in facilitating social integration among Latino newcomers in a Nebraskan meatpacking town was "surprisingly limited." The only church to offer services in Spanish was a Catholic Czech church, but Latino attendance was low and the church had no other religious/social activities for Latinos. Soccer was more important in this town than the church in fostering Latino communal identity. Interviews with several Latino immigrants who live in a small Iowa town with approximately 100 new Hispanic residents indicate that immigrants "experience both social and religious isolation" (Westholm 1998:18). None of the Latino immigrants attends church, since the local services are in English only. One male informant indicated how he felt about the lack of religious opportunities:

I've lost a lot. Now I feel—I don't know how I feel—
but before when I went to church I felt more at peace.
Now, because I don't go to church anymore I feel bad
(Westholm 1998:14).

In her conclusion, Westholm states that Latino immigrants, as new residents of an Iowan town:

Find that their positive images of their own involvement in society are limited by a rejection from the dominant group. They ... feel alienated and friendless, especially the women, as they struggle to adapt to their new surroundings. [They feel] deeply saddened by the loss of their families [due to] economic situations beyond their control (Westholm 1998:18).

These initial feelings and experiences must be typical for many Latinos who move into new destination communities. When Latinos first began moving to Iowa, residents and community organizations were unprepared. Very few Iowans speak Spanish, and Spanish translations of community announcements and information are nonexistent. The first Latino newcomers to arrive in a new destination have no established Spanish network of contacts to help negotiate local necessities. At best, Anglo residents are likely to ignore Latino immigrants who settle in their communities because they assume that, like Mexican migrant laborers, the newcomers are a temporary population and will go away. At worst, discriminatory attitudes and actions estrange newcomers from local residents.

Interviews with some of the first Latino immigrants in Marshalltown indicated that the initial difficulties people faced were language and cultural differences, local discrimination, the cold weather, not knowing anyone, and not knowing where anything was located (e.g., stores, schools, local organizations). Several interviewees compared Marshalltown to their experiences in other places (California, Texas) where "everyone" speaks Spanish and there are many people to help one settle in. When I asked one Latina to explain what she meant by local discrimination, she responded:

At first when I arrived, I noted much discrimination because there were not many Hispanics and it was difficult to make myself understood. When I tried to speak the little [English] I knew, many people said they could not understand me. And this really embarrassed

me. I stopped going to class [ESL] because I was afraid to leave my house.

This woman linked her lack of English and few Hispanic residents to the problem of discrimination. She went on in the interview to say that now she speaks better English, has several Anglo friends, and feels at home. In the context of this woman's earlier experiences, and information provided by Westholm and Sister Carol, it can be understood how alone and unconnected Latino immigrants were when they first came to Marshalltown (see also Baker 2004). No one in Marshalltown helped them or welcomed them to the community. In that context, Rev. John Allen, who spoke practically no Spanish, extended an invitation to a handful of Latinos to attend church and began working with Latinos to create a community identity. Consequently, their efforts began transforming Marshalltown into a culturally diverse community.

Rev. John Allen and Latino Community Identity

Rev. John Allen arrived at Elim Lutheran Church in Marshalltown in 1982.⁵ People remember him as a "starter" and someone who was "always interested in helping the less fortunate." In addition to his pastoral work at Elim, Allen was an active member of the community and initiated many new projects. He established a prison ministry at the Riverview Release Facility, a local hospice, and a children's daycare center at Elim. He became a hospital chaplain. In 1990, he received an award from the state governor for his outreach work with prison inmates. Then, in December 1990, a new need presented itself to Allen. He made a few inquiries, but found no one reaching out to the Latino immigrants. In fact, a local Catholic priest told Allen the Latinos can "come to mass in English." And so Allen took on a new ministry.

Allen approached the Latino newcomers as a sincere friend and someone who listened to what they had to say. He frequently visited Latinos in their homes and blessed their houses and other important items when asked. Many immigrants moved to Marshalltown with little proper winter clothing and no furniture. Helping Hands, established at Elim, provided household items and personal necessities to the immigrants. Latinos were referred to the Food Box, a food pantry sponsored by Churches United in Compassion and Concern. Allen was available around the clock seven days a week, and Allen's home was known as a safe house in case of an INS raid. Allen's personal relationships with Latinos developed a deep trust (*confianza*) and mutual respect between him and immigrant newcomers.

Allen based his Hispanic ministry on what he had learned as a missionary in Africa. He had learned the value of language and not destroying the culture of others. "If one hopes to understand others, then one needs to know their language." So Allen enrolled in Spanish classes. He even went to Mexico to practice speaking Spanish. An ex-Catholic priest in Chicago helped him locate liturgical materials in Spanish, and a Brazilian intern at Elim initially helped him translate his Sunday liturgy into Spanish. Allen made plenty of language errors. For example, he used *bandido* (bandit) instead of *bendito* (blessed). Everyone laughed after his mistake had been "graciously" pointed out to him. When Allen's Spanish improved, he was called to the hospital, to the jail, or any other place Latinos found themselves in need of a translator. He even began a Sunday school for Latino children.

Allen never approached Latinos by trying to convert them to Lutheranism. He wanted to establish a religious environment that fit their expectations of church. And so he asked his new Latino friends what they needed; and he provided, or made, the religious items and rituals they expected in church. Music with a more Latin flavor was important, and so a choir was formed,

which, together with several guitar players, provided music for mass. Votives with saints' pictures, a small statue of the Virgen de Guadalupe, and fresh flowers were placed on a small table at the back of the Elim sanctuary. This altar was a place for Latinos to pray and offer *mandas*. On Good Friday, Allen made a representation of the bloodied, crucified body of Christ, and placed it at the front altar.⁶ In May, the Latino congregation celebrated the Month of Mary with special masses and processions and filled the church with flowers. Allen noticed that not many of the Latinos were taking communion. When he asked them why, they responded to him about the need for confession prior to communion. He offered his services, but members of the Spanish congregation were uncomfortable with confessing face-to-face. They wanted a confession box, and so Allen built a confessional.

Through Allen's ministry, Latinos in Marshalltown were forming a community that developed its identity through the creation of the Spanish-speaking congregation at Elim. According to Allen: "It was taking the religious symbols of where [they] came from and putting them into a new place which strengthened the moral fiber, because the God [they] knew in Mexico was the same God who was in the North...[it is important] to validate their culture, not make them who you are, but to allow them to be what they are." Together Allen and the new Latino congregation celebrated baptisms, weddings, funerals, and First Communions. Elim church became the religious and social center for new immigrants.

Building Bridges between Latino Newcomers and Anglo Residents

Rev. Allen was the only pastor at Elim. He had responsibilities to his English-speaking parishioners as well as his Spanish ones, and he tried to bring the two congregations together.

Several Anglo members of the congregation helped him with his Latino ministry. For example, Dick Bakke, who was a night security guard at Swift's, handed out flyers announcing worship services. Allen tried having potlucks at the church so Anglos and Latinos could meet each other. First Communion services were celebrated together. One Anglo female parishioner, who was very appreciative of the Latino ministry at Elim, stated: "I think it just helps to open everyone up to be around other cultures. We are so sheltered here in the Midwest. There aren't as many people from other races here. They [Mexicans] are teaching us a great deal about giving and sharing and loving" (E.L.C.A. 1991). But most of the attempts to bridge the Anglo-Latino groups were unsuccessful because of communication difficulties and the preferences of people in both groups to sit together.

Allen was aware of the need to make Latinos feel more comfortable in the broader Marshalltown community. One of the first things he did was to work with the local community college to set up ESL classes at Elim. Many of the Latinos with whom Allen worked were young, single men. He was concerned for their safety, and tried to educate them about drinking and driving, local dating customs, and appropriate public behavior. One way to "normalize" young men into Anglo culture was through the YMCA. The YMCA director gave free memberships to Latino men that Allen recommended to him. It was a challenge working with young men, and also heartbreaking. One young man whom Allen repeatedly tried to help ended up in a fatal car crash. He had been drunk at the time of the accident.

One way to bring people together is through a party, and so, in December 1991, a large public celebration of the Feast of the Virgen de Guadalupe was planned. Many civic organizations were involved, and the fiesta was a huge success. A dance with no alcohol took place at the YMCA and was sponsored by Elim, Iowa State University Extension, SATUCI [Substance

Abuse Treatment Center Unit of Iowa], and the YMCA. St. Mary's Catholic Church hosted the novena, and Swift's donated pork. Local newspaper coverage was excellent, and it was a great opportunity to educate local residents about an important Mexican celebration, and through food, dance and music create a fun social environment for everyone.

John Allen had a good reputation in Marshalltown for starting new projects, and he did much to help educate the public about Latino newcomers. He spoke to local service clubs and wrote letters to the editor about Latino concerns. In 1991, he organized the Hispanic Concerns Task Force, a group of community representatives who promoted "ethnic understanding and harmony in the community, [and] advocacy and networking of community agencies" (Roe 1992). Many people in Marshalltown applauded the work that Allen was doing with the Latino newcomers. One person even commented: "One of the greatest gestures of the community was to invite them [Latinos] into the church. People appreciate what Elim Lutheran Church did" (Roe 1992). Others were not so positive, and a vocal few began to make Allen's life difficult. The negative comments and physical and psychological burden of the Hispanic ministry led Allen to resign from Elim. So that others may benefit from Allen's Latino ministry efforts, it is important to consider possible explanations for this turn of events, and also examine what Allen did to ensure that the Latino congregation maintained its social and cultural identity.

Allen's Ministry in Critical Perspective

As the Latino congregation at Elim expanded, and the number of Latinos in Marshalltown continued to increase, Allen faced a number of challenges both within his church and from the Marshalltown community at large. An examination

of Allen's personal beliefs and practices and his ministry style provides insight into how Allen responded to his critics. To begin, and although perhaps not a conscious course of action, Allen over-identified with his Latino congregation, or, in anthropological jargon, he "went native." He became so immersed in the Latino community and their values, culture, and immigration problems that their fears became his fears. Due to the extent to which he became involved in the personal lives of many of the Latino parishioners, he did not fully realize how much Anglos still had to learn and understand. He committed himself fully to working with the Latino congregation and helping Latinos adjust to life in Marshalltown. This commitment has positive and negative consequences. Allen's wife, Marilyn, sums up this point nicely. She explains:

John is a pioneer who can take the lead for a while and that initial heat that comes along with it...you can take it because you feel it's the right thing to do...later on, someone else will stabilize it.

From another perspective, Allen's personality and dedication to the Hispanic ministry led some community members to describe him as "strong minded" and even "abrasive." He tended to act first, and then build consensus afterward. Allen even admits that he "did not listen to his congregation a couple of times and had to pay the price." His strong feelings about Latinos and their plight in the local community meant that he occasionally scolded Anglos for their attitudes and behaviors.

Allen preached about racism from the pulpit, and he may have angered several people. He was quick to dismiss a lack of support for Hispanic ministry as discrimination or racism. Allen talked about racism as primarily cultural racism. He may not have been aware of, or sensitive to, class issues that were troublesome for some Anglos. Early Latino immigrants tended

to have low levels of education and to work for low wages. As members of a lower socioeconomic class, they were changing Marshalltown's image in many ways. Class and culture both need to be addressed, as the former may be masked by the latter. Allen could have provided more education and explanation of what he and/or the Latino congregation were doing and why. For example, in response to Anglo criticism about the Guadalupe celebration, Allen stated: "It's their problem. They didn't have to come. They just didn't want it at all." Lots of patience and education are needed in both directions. In the future, clergy and lay alike need to realize that Anglo parishioners/residents are just as important as Latino newcomers and they need to be an integral part of the education and decision-making processes that are part of community transformations.⁷

The major divisive issue that Allen faced was that "Catholics" were worshipping in a "Lutheran" church. For Allen, this presented no problem. In fact, as he explained:

We need to reach out, not just for the people's sake, but for our own sake, too. When we share cultures we share the universal church-catholic. We are doing the work of the church.

This perspective enabled Allen to emphasize and respond to the spiritual as well as the social needs of his Latino congregation, and was ultimately successful in building a Latino community identity. But for others, denominations and even parishes are clearly differentiated.⁸ Some Elim Anglo parishioners viewed the Latinos as ill-behaved people in a sacred church. They did not understand why Latino men moved around all over the altar area to get a picture of the host on their child's tongue during First Communion. Their views of "proper church behavior," combined with the Virgin's altar and the confessional, led them to question Allen when the Latinos were "going to become Christians?" At least one member of the congregation wrote the Lutheran Bishop and complained

about the “Catholic” symbols in church, and particularly the confession box. [Marilyn Allen remarked during our interview that John knew he had gone over the line with that one.] Some of those who supported the Hispanic ministry wanted to make the Latinos part of their church; that is, convert them to Lutheranism.

The 1991 celebration of the Virgen de Guadalupe also had attracted the attention of the Catholic Archbishop, who questioned the Lutheran Bishop about Allen “proselytizing to Mexicans who are too ignorant to understand the difference between Lutherans and Catholics.” And a group of Latinos themselves came to the Elim church council and asked for their help in arranging for a Catholic Hispanic minister.

By late spring of 1992, Elim was becoming a divided church, and Allen was criticized for creating two separate congregations, and paying more attention to the Latinos than the Anglos. Although Allen did try bilingual services, he found it was too exhausting for him to manage going back and forth in the two languages. An anonymous petition circulated in early 1992 to remove him as minister. His family received hate mail (Roe 1992). Allen was pulled in so many directions that he could no longer manage everything. Not unlike others who have done the initial contact work and ministry development among newcomer populations in Iowa, Allen finally burned out. Work with Latino newcomers requires a tremendous amount of energy, and physical and mental stamina. Sister Carol, mentioned earlier in this article, described her ministry with Latino newcomers like the boy with his thumb in the dike. One more pressure or responsibility may at any time break the dam. Effective Hispanic ministry among Latino newcomers in the Midwest requires an extremely delicate balance to manage everyone’s needs, including the Hispanic minister’s.

Allen knew he had established a strong Latino community identity at Elim, and he did not want to undermine its solidar-

ity and cohesion. When he and Father Paul were discussing the transition of the Latino ministry from Elim to St. Mary's, the two of them decided there should be no break in the two ministries, no saying "Sorry, guys, you weren't in the real church for awhile." So they celebrated mass together, and together planned the procession from Elim to St. Mary's, where Hispanic ministry continued, and continues, to flourish and make a significant contribution to Latino community identity and Marshalltown community transformation.

Building upon Allen's Legacy: Community Transformations Since 1992

Since the Latino congregation had a strong community identity, and lay members of the congregation stepped up to organize choirs, catechism classes, and lay-led prayer groups, Father Paul, who wanted Latinos to establish roots in Marshalltown, became a strong social and legal advocate for the Latinos. He and Sister Anna Marie Manternach opened a Hispanic Ministry Office that became an immigration office.⁹ They divided their time between filing immigration and citizenship papers, speaking to local community groups about Latinos, encouraging social ties between Anglos and Latinos, and providing religious services. Their office was a safe place for all Latinos. Other leadership changes in Hispanic ministry at St. Mary's, and the availability of new Hispanic ministry programs (for example, at First Baptist Church), infuse new opportunities for further transformations [see Sister Karen Thien below] (Woodrick 2005).

After John Allen left Elim, a bilingual minister was hired, but since all the Latino families and individuals had begun attending St. Mary's, Spanish worship services were not continued. Elim has remained active in social ministry. They will assist newcomers with food, clothing and furniture

needs. They offer child care, and also monies for college scholarships.

As the Latino population in Marshalltown grew, so did the visibility of the Latino community in Marshalltown. Latinos became a critical mass in schools, at medical clinics, and in public areas like the parks and malls. Language and cultural differences continued to prevent easy communication between the newcomers and established residents.¹⁰ Early distinctions between newcomers and local residents, based largely on ethnicity, gave way to more negative stereotyping based on Anglo perceptions of Latinos as illegal and drug smugglers. Latinos were criticized for not paying taxes and not speaking English. Several key events between 1996 and 2000 triggered an outlash of public criticism by a few vocal residents toward the Latinos.¹¹ It appeared that much of the positive work initiated by Allen and continued by Father Paul and Sister Anna Marie was being undermined, and the foundations for community transformation were being eroded.

In 1996, the Swift plant was raided by the INS; as a result, 148 Latinos were arrested and deported. The issue of "illegal aliens" moved to the forefront of public awareness as other INS raids occurred in Iowa and Nebraska. For example, a *Des Moines Register* article in September 1996 stated that Iowa had the fourth largest number of illegal immigrant apprehensions in 13 central US states (Norman 1996). The following year the INS opened new enforcement branches in Cedar Rapids and Des Moines. The press coverage of Latino immigrants not only highlighted their illegal status, but also connected immigrants to drug smuggling. In March 1998 US NEWS AND WORLD REPORT ran a cover story in which Marshalltown was linked to a methamphetamine pipeline from Mexico through California to central Iowa (McGraw 1998). One week later, the front page of the local newspaper covered the timely arrest of two Latino males who had been charged with possession of illegal substances. Iowans read about federal responses to the "prob-

lem" of illegal immigrants in the Midwest. For example, Operation Vanguard was an INS initiative designed to track down undocumented workers without the need for worksite raids. The INS checked employment applications with social security records, and employers were then informed which employees had documentation problems. The INS also considered creating federal-local arrangements that would give local police specific immigration responsibilities and authority. One consequence of this negative publicity about Latino immigrants was English Only legislation at the state, county and local levels. In 2000, Governor Vilsack signed an English Only bill.

During this critical time period, the Marshalltown Diversity Committee (a reorganized Hispanic Concerns Task Force) and Hispanic ministries provided guidance, information, and programming that helped reinforce the Latino community identity and did much to reinforce positive images of Marshalltown as a diversified community working together.

In March 1996, the Marshalltown Diversity Committee formed as a reorganization of the then-defunct Hispanic Concerns Task Force created by John Allen. This committee provided many important community activities that served as a bridge between the Anglo and the Latino populations. After the 1996 INS raid, public forums sponsored by the Diversity Committee allowed Anglos and Latinos to speak up about issues associated with immigration. In 1998, the Diversity Community decided to hold a Marshalltown Heritage Day festival on July 4th and celebrate the ethnic diversity (both old and new) with music, food, a fashion show, and a ceremony recognizing those who had become recent U.S. citizens. This first Heritage Day was a success. Both Latino families and Anglo families participated. The Diversity Committee partnered with Marshalltown Community College and the YMCA to sponsor Cinco de Mayo celebrations and other multicultural events in downtown Marshalltown.

The monthly meetings of the Diversity Committee brought together key community leaders from service organizations; civic leaders; educators, clergy and lay representatives from Methodist, Lutheran, Catholic, Baptist and Presbyterian churches; and representatives of other faith-based organizations such as the Salvation Army, the YMCA, and ecumenical organizations (including Churches United in Concern and Compassion [CUCC]). An important feature of the organization is the opportunity it provides all faith-based organizations to work together for common causes and concerns. Over the years the Diversity Committee also has tried to include Latinos in their meetings, but for the most part, Latino attendance was minimal. Long working hours, family responsibilities, and a discomfort still with a politically powerful Anglo group prevented their participation.

Members of the Diversity Committee shared information and discussed possible solutions to make new immigrants feel connected and welcome in their community. Information shared and discussed in this group helped educate Anglo community members, especially Anglo congregations. Adult educational programs, multicultural activities, social ministry outreach (e.g., ESL tutors), and advocacy initiatives helped create a greater understanding and awareness of immigrant needs and issues. For example, in the fall of 1996 the United Methodist Church in Iowa initiated a discussion concerning due process for undocumented immigrants and how local churches might respond. One option was to offer sanctuary. This topic was discussed by the Diversity Committee and debated by many denominational congregations in town.

The Marshalltown Diversity Committee also worked with faith-based organizations in new programming. In 1998, the Marshalltown Diversity Committee won a \$5,000 grant from Iowa Ecumenical Ministries. The monies were to help strengthen programs providing important services to Latinos. St. Mary's Hispanic Ministry used grant money to

make citizenship classes more accessible to Latino residents; the First Baptist Church received funds to expand ESL classes and child care services; and a rotating loan assistance program was established at the House of Compassion (homeless shelter managed by CUCC) to help people make the transition from the homeless shelter to rental housing.

One concern that Anglo leaders have had (and an observation made by outside researchers) is the lack of leadership among the new immigrants. Griffith (2004) mentions the informal leadership of local Mexican entrepreneurs and Latino spokespersons within St. Mary's, but active Latino leadership involvement in civic planning is not recognized. Initially, Latino immigrants in a new environment are not going to feel comfortable or safe speaking out in public. Leadership needs to be encouraged and supported. Contrary to recent reports, grassroots Latino leadership has emerged in Marshalltown largely through the efforts of faith-based organizations.

The first expression of Latino leadership in the public domain occurred in 1999. Latinos responded to all the media publicity about illegal immigrants and drug/crime problems, and shared their own experiences with police discrimination. Sister Karen Thein, who replaced Father Paul and Sister Anna Marie in 1997, encouraged Latinos at St. Mary's to speak up about how they felt about the discrimination and stereotyping directed toward all Latino immigrants. A group of Latinos spoke at a city council meeting in the spring of 1999, and, on Palm Sunday of that year, they organized a protest/prayer vigil. After Palm Sunday Mass, more than 200 Latinos marched to the courthouse in Marshalltown and had a rally. Their message was simple: family and community are important to us.

In 2001, Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement (CCI), a faith-based organization, began organizing a new chapter at St. Mary's Church. Their objective was to promote a grassroots Latino leadership organization.¹² The Catholic

Campaign for Human Development funded the project. In August 2003, *Latinos en Acción* was formally organized and headed by a Latino leadership committee of eight. One of the eight is Eligio Sanchez, whose family began attending church with John Allen. This group has worked with Swift's, the superintendent of schools, members of Congress, and others to promote education, advocacy, and safer working conditions for immigrant workers. One current project is to implement a district-wide anti-bullying program for all public schools in Marshalltown.

In May 2004, the Marshalltown Diversity Committee formally voted to disband because they felt the services of the committee were no longer needed. *Latinos en Acción* can now promote Latino issues and awareness and work directly with community organizations to build a better and stronger community for all residents.

Conclusion

In the beginning the few new Latino immigrants living in Marshalltown were an isolated, invisible population. Rev. John Allen's simple, but so important, gesture of welcoming the newcomers, and his tireless commitment to Hispanic ministry laid the first blocks in building a Latino community identity and in integrating Latinos into Marshalltown. The Latino community in Marshalltown has grown significantly over the years, and the needs and issues related to community development, both within the Latino immigrant group and Marshalltown as a whole, have changed. Hispanic ministry can never be static, and what works well for one situation may not be the answer for others. What is apparent is that the process of accommodating recent immigrants into the Marshalltown landscape involves responding to social, cultural, and religious advocacy and leadership development needs. No one person can do it

all, but one person *did* make a difference and set into motion many programs that later on were significant in transforming Marshalltown into a culturally diverse and successful community.

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NOTES

- 1 In 2000, Governor Vilsack identified Marshalltown as a model community for its readiness to welcome immigrants and refugees as a potential new work force in Iowa. Marshalltown, along with Fort Dodge and Mason City, were designated as Pilot Communities. Community assessments of each town were mandated. See Grey et al. (2001) for the Pilot Community Assessment of Marshalltown.
- 2 A slightly expanded version of the vignette that introduces this paper is included in Grey and Woodrick 2002, but no analysis of Allen's ministry is provided.
- 3 Another significant definition of community in Marshalltown is the transnational community, or "sister city" relationship between Marshalltown and Villachuato, Michoacán, Mexico. For greater details on this relationship see Conte 2002; Grey 2000; Grey and Woodrick 2002, 2005. How faith-based organizations influence and shape this community is the subject of future research.
- 4 Race and Hispanic Origin 1990-2003, Iowa Census Data Tables, State Library of Iowa. <http://www.silo.lib.ia.us>

- 5 John Allen was born in 1945 and raised in Southern California. In 1967 he began his theological education at a Trappist monastery in Iowa. He was ordained in 1972. His first call was in Mobile, Alabama, among poor African Americans. He was pastor of the Martin Luther Lutheran Church and principal of the school. He met his wife, Marilyn, when she came to teach at his school. Two weeks after she arrived, they agreed to marry. In 1974 the Allen family moved to Salem, Ohio, where John Allen worked in a rural parish, and became friends with local Amish families. Two years later, he and his family moved to Kenya, and served as missionaries. The family moved to Marshalltown in 1982. In 1988 Allen received a Doctor of Ministry degree from the Graduate Theological Foundation of Notre Dame. He and his wife raised three children and they currently live in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.
- 6 Allen commented on the importance the crucified Christ had for his Latino congregation. Their Christ is, he said, the Lord of Health and Healing. In fact, the patron saint of Villachuato is *El Señor de la Salud* (Our Lord of Health). Perhaps without realizing it, Allen enabled Villachuatans to relate to their hometown saint through his Good Friday model of the bloodied Christ.
- 7 One of the significant reasons for Marshalltown's current success with welcoming new immigrants to the community has been the attention given to educating and providing experiences for the Anglo population as well as the newcomers (Griffith 2004; Grey and Woodrick 2005).
- 8 European ethnicity in Marshalltown is strongly connected to church affiliations. Norwegians attended Elim Lutheran, Germans established Redeemer Lutheran, and the Swedes went to Trinity Lutheran. Occasional worship services in Norwegian were occurring at Elim into the 1950s.
- 9 Father Paul had been a missionary in Bolivia for one year and had worked with Latino congregations in Texas. Two months after he arrived in Marshalltown he hired Sister Anna Marie, a Franciscan Sister who had been a missionary in Chile for 25 years and had also worked with him in Texas.
- 10 Griffith (2004:30) recently surveyed 69 Latino immigrants in Marshalltown; of these, only 18.8% indicated they spoke English "well" or were "fluent."
- 11 For a more complete review of these events and other community issues between 1996-2000, see Grey and Woodrick 2005.
- 12 Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement (CCI) is a faith-based organization established in 1975 by a group of clergy at St. Joseph's

Catholic Church (now called Queen of Peace Parish) in Waterloo, IA. The mission of the ICCI is to empower and unite people of all ethnic backgrounds to take control of their communities, involve them in identifying problems and needs and taking action to address them, and to be a vehicle for social, economic, environmental justice. Currently, there are 2,200 dues-paying members.

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