



Immigration and integration: religious and political activism for/with immigrants in Los Angeles

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Abstract: Although the role of religion in the lives of immigrants has recently been a subject of interest by scholars, there has not been much focus on the importance of the religio-political activism of faith-based and community organizations in favour of immigrants. This article focuses on a religious congregation, Immanuel Presbyterian Church, and a community-organizing network, the Salvadoran American National Association, to demonstrate how religion is actively promoting and aiding political engagement on behalf of and with immigrants in Los Angeles, with a particular, although not exclusive, focus on immigrants of Latino origin, who comprise the lion's share of immigrants in Los Angeles County. The theoretical analysis builds on concepts drawn from religious activism for immigrant rights and theories of social mobilization, interest groups, symbolic and social capital, and economic and morality politics. We use a triangulated methodological approach that includes observation and participant observation, interviews, content analysis of multimedia and intellectual advocacy for the immigrant rights movement.

Key words: immigration, integration, religious activism, political activism, Los Angeles, New Sanctuary Movement, faith-based organizations, multiculturalism

Let that be the prayer of the LORD'S redeemed, those redeemed from the hand of the foe, Those gathered from foreign lands, from east and west, from north and south. Some had lost their way in a barren desert; found no path toward a city to live in. They were hungry and thirsty; their life was ebbing away. In their distress they cried to the LORD, who rescued them in their peril. Guided them by a direct path so they reached a city to live in. Psalms 107(106): 2-3.4-5.6-7.

I Introduction

Although the role of religion in the lives of immigrants has recently been a subject of much interest to scholars (Hondagneu-Sotelo *et al.*, 2004, 2007; Miller *et al.*, 2001, 2002; Vázquez and Friedmann, 2003), planners and other urban scholars have not given due attention to the vibrancy and importance of religion in contemporary cities, and particularly in global cities that are home to immigrants of growing ethnic and religious diversity (Davey, 2001; Irazábal and Dyrness, 2010). Religion provides a means for immigrants and their allies to transform their new surroundings into meaningful spiritual, cultural and sometimes political places that facilitate immigrants' societal integration and yet help immigrants maintain and nurture their distinct cultural identities.

While the political and policy aspects of the current immigration debate in the US have been extensively documented and analyzed, the role of religion in the lives of immigrants and the practice of religious activism in support of immigrant rights have not been as thoroughly explored. In the midst of a polarized national climate on immigration policy, certain Los Angeles-based churches, faith-based organizations and groups of immigrants have adopted policies and actions that support immigrants, extending beyond the traditional role of religious institutions into a political arena. These policies and actions lend religious legitimacy and support to many unauthorized immigrant communities in Greater Los Angeles,

the majority of which is ethnically Latina/o yet is also multiethnic and non-Latina/o. In some of the struggles faced by these immigrant communities, religiosity has provided a platform for the mobilization of immigrants and their supporters, the empowerment of the involved organizations and the transformation of the national political climate around immigration reform. Thus, this article explores how the religious and civic practices of selected organizations in Los Angeles facilitate or hinder immigrant integration, considering both the function of two progressive institutions in supporting immigrants and the agency of immigrants themselves, with a particular focus on immigrants of Latino origin, who comprise the lion's share of immigrants in Los Angeles County. These two institutions were selected for their ability, one as an explicitly religious organization, Immanuel Presbyterian Church, and the other as an overtly civic organization, the Salvadoran American National Association, to shed light on the important role and interwoven nature of religious and political activism in the lives of immigrants in Los Angeles.

We offer theoretical insights into the intersection of religion and politics at the community level, and particularly into the effect of religiosity on political behaviour. Our literature review includes the role of religion in immigrant assimilation, and religious activism and faith-based organizing for immigrant rights. The analysis presented here also builds on concepts drawn from theories of social mobilization, interest groups, symbolic and social capital, and economic and morality politics. Using a triangulated methodological approach, we engaged in observation and participant observation of rallies, meetings and various types of events organized by religious and faith-based groups in Los Angeles that had religious and political dimensions. Second, we performed content analysis of media materials (flyers, TV and newspaper reports, websites) that covered the events and ethical and religious values of churches and faith-based groups.

Third, we photographed and video-recorded key material from interviews, site visits and events for multimedia content analysis. Next, interview data was drawn from key agents of these phenomena, including individuals involved in organizing events related to struggles for immigration reform or rights (in non-profit organizations, faith-based groups and unions), participants in such events (US citizens and authorized and unauthorized immigrants), clergy and leaders within the faith-based and religious institution responsible for organizing such events, and reporters, local legislators and academics that have covered such events or taken issue with immigration reform and immigrant rights. Finally, through acting as public intellectual advocates for the immigrant rights movement, we have learned about the subject at hand and the dialectic tensions it evokes, having been called to discuss immigration issues in several radio, newspaper and TV media outlets, including the *Los Angeles Times*, National Public Radio and NBC News.

II Immigrant integration and religious and political activism

Immigration policy in the United States

It is estimated that the unauthorized immigrant population in the US numbers roughly 10 million (Capps and Fortuny, 2007). For the vast majority of these 10 million immigrants, current US immigration law does not provide a path towards gaining legal status in the country. The most recent significant reform of immigration policy in the US was in 1986, when the Immigration Reform and Control Act was enacted, which granted amnesty to millions of unauthorized immigrants (provided they met certain criteria) and made it illegal for employers to knowingly hire unauthorized immigrants. Since 1986, there has been no major federal immigration law enacted by Congress, while immigration to the US has steadily continued. In 2005, the US House of Representatives passed the Border Protection,

Anti-terrorism and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005 (H.R. 4437), which would have made it a felony to reside in the US without authorization and would have penalized those who assisted unauthorized immigrants, including churches and aid-workers. Although never signed into law, H.R. 4437 galvanized pro- and anti-immigrant groups to action, and served as a rally-cry behind what became some of the largest marches for civil rights in US history, including the 25 March 2006 march in Los Angeles, which was estimated to have drawn in between 500,000 and 1 million participants (Watanabe and Becerra, 2006). Hundreds of diverse faith-based organizations, including those of Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, Jewish and other faiths, united against H.R. 4437 and in support of comprehensive immigration reform, including Cardinal Roger Mahony of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles County (the largest Archdiocese in the country), who was then and remains a vocal supporter of immigrant rights within both faith-based and civic activism circles in Los Angeles and across the US (Pomfret, 2006). In 2006, the US Senate passed the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2006 (S.2611), which would have provided a path towards legalization for millions of unauthorized immigrants residing in the US (provided they met key criteria and paid back taxes and fines), yet the differences between the House bill (H.R. 4437) and Senate bill (S.2611) were never reconciled in Congress. Thus, immigration policy has been left at a standstill in the US, and the political climate around immigration reform has become increasingly polarized, with local and state governments taking federal immigration matters into their own hands, the most recent example of which is the Arizona immigration law S.B. 1070, signed into law on 23 April 2010, which criminalizes unauthorized immigration by defining it as trespassing and allows local law-enforcement agencies to question individuals they suspect are unauthorized (Riccardi, 2010). Los Angeles Cardinal Mahony again

has come to the defence of unauthorized immigrants and voiced opposition to the Arizona law, along with hundreds of other faith-based groups across the US, including the National Coalition of Latino Clergy and Christian Leaders, who filed a lawsuit against the Arizona law, arguing that it is unconstitutional (*ibid.*).

2 *The immigrant landscape of Los Angeles*

Traditionally a major gateway region for immigrants coming to the US, California and Los Angeles in particular, underwent a dramatic demographic shift during the second half of the 20th century (Myers, 2007). Twenty-seven per cent of California's population, or 10 million residents, are foreign-born (*ibid.*: 39). In Los Angeles County, one in three persons, or 36.2 per cent of the population, is foreign-born (US Census Bureau, 2006). Los Angeles County is home to the largest foreign-born population (3.4 million) in the US, far surpassing the immigrant populations of the next two highest-ranking counties, Miami-Dade County, Florida and Queens County, New York, each of which contains immigrant populations that number approximately 1.1 million (US Census Bureau, 2003).

In the US, nearly three-quarters of the nation's authorized immigrants are of Latino origin, the majority of whom are from Mexico (59 per cent), and the remainder of whom are from various regions, including Asia (11 per cent), Central America (11 per cent), South America (7 per cent), the Caribbean (4 per cent) and the Middle East (2 per cent) (Passel and Cohn, 2009). California is estimated to contain nearly one-quarter of the nation's unauthorized immigrant population (2.5 million), and the Los Angeles metropolitan area roughly one-tenth of the nation's and two-fifths of the state's unauthorized immigrants (Capps and Fortuny, 2007). New York, whose unauthorized immigrant population is second in size after Los Angeles, contains only half the number of authorized immigrants (half a million) as Los Angeles (*ibid.*). Thus, California

and Los Angeles, in particular, are justifiably so the centre of the nation's debate over immigrant rights, the result of which will carry a decidedly more tangible and widespread impact to the residents of Los Angeles and California than to those living in other areas of the country.

In Los Angeles, Latina/os (both non-immigrants and immigrants) constitute 47.3 per cent of the population, and Asians (13.1 per cent) have surpassed African Americans (9.6 per cent) as the county's second-largest non-White ethnic group (US Census Bureau, 2006). Mexican immigrants constitute a higher share of the foreign-born population in Los Angeles (43 per cent) than they do in the nation (32 per cent), yet within the unauthorized immigrant population, Mexicans comprise less of a share in Los Angeles (57 per cent) than they do in California (64 per cent), suggesting a greater level of diversity within the unauthorized immigrant population of Los Angeles than that of California (Capps and Fortuny, 2007). While immigrants of Latino origin are the largest immigrant group in Los Angeles, they are not the only immigrant group: there are more immigrants from the Middle East in Los Angeles than any other region of the country, and Armenians, for example, constitute the second-largest group of limited-English speaking students in the Los Angeles Unified School District (Miller *et al.*, 2002).

Thus, at the beginning of the century, Los Angeles has emerged as a truly multi-ethnic, global city. Today, approximately one-third of all the zip codes in Los Angeles County do not have a single ethnic group that constitutes a majority (*ibid.*). For many of the millions of immigrants in the Los Angeles area, religion plays an important role in their lives, and reciprocally, immigrants and their religiosity exert a strong influence on life in Los Angeles County (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2007a, 2008; Irazábal and Dyrness, 2010). For example, in the Los Angeles Catholic Archdiocese, more than 60 per cent of the 4 million members are

Latina/os, all seminarians are requested to learn Spanish and Spanish masses are offered in 187 of 287 churches (Miller *et al.*, 2002). Moreover, the success of Los Angeles, and the US as a whole, in integrating its immigrant populations will carry larger impacts on civil society. As the baby boomer population retires, immigrants and their children will increasingly be relied upon to meet the needs of an aging workforce (Pastor and Ortiz, 2009), and the integration of immigrants into both their local contexts and a broader US framework is thus a key development issue that brings with it significant socio-economic impacts for a larger civil society.

3 *The role of religion in immigrant integration*

Immigration helps shape cities as a whole, profoundly impacting a city's economic, social and political sphere. As such, both the lives of immigrants and non-immigrants are affected by the demography of immigration. Many public and private, religious and secular institutions share the responsibilities of helping immigrants become incorporated into American life. Yet historically, religious groups have always played a central role in helping new immigrants settle in the US. Religious groups help immigrants find housing and employment, assist them in understanding a new language and legal system, connect them to medical care in an emergency, negotiate problems that arise between first-generation immigrants and their children, help immigrants find their way in a complex mix of contrasting and competing ethnic identities and offer a helping hand if they run out of cash or have a brush with the law (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2007b; Treviño, 2006; Vázquez and Friedmann, 2003).

For many immigrants, religion is also a mediating institution that provides a bridge between them and the new culture, one that they often fear and are just learning to navigate. Although some religious organizations and leaders in the US are socially conservative and support the status quo (Acuña, 1972), many

draw on their faith to support progressive struggles for greater political rights and social justice for minorities in general, and immigrants in particular. Many immigrants, and particularly the unauthorized, approach religious places for refuge and hope. In such places, they find a supportive network that helps them sort out the challenges of social isolation, language barriers and obstacles to employment. According to interviews of their clergy (our own and those reported by Irazábal and Dyrness, 2010; Miller *et al.*, 2002; and Hondagneu-Sotelo *et al.*, 2007), these immigrant churches are deeply committed to providing those services for moral reasons, in a spirit of justice and love. We can therefore assert that while religion may not be the only institution in Los Angeles that assists new immigrants, it is clearly one of the most important. In fact, as Espinosa (2005: 5) suggests in the case of Latina/os, 'Latino religious ideology, institutions, leaders, and symbols ... have served as the ideological glue for some of the most important struggles in the Latino community over the past 150 years.' In recent years in particular, advocacy for immigrants has been embraced by many churches and faith coalitions in the Los Angeles area and other major metropolitan areas in the US.

The traditional view of religion's role for immigrants stressed the function of assimilation (see works by Gans, 1992; Gordon, 1964; Portes and Rumbaut, 1996). In the new paradigm within the sociology of religion, however, religion not only aids in incorporation to the US, but it also functions to preserve identification with the home country (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2007a; Miller *et al.*, 2001). Religious practices in the US help immigrants maintain their national identity as Mexicans, Guatemalans, Armenians, Koreans, etc. True, some members of the second generation join 'American churches' and shed their connection with the homeland, but many of these immigrant congregations continue ethnic practices into the second and third generation – if not longer – precisely because they are

places where ethnic groups can enjoy the company of individuals with similar roots.

In religious organizations, many individuals, families and communities find a legitimate, often taken-for-granted mechanism both for sustaining ethnic identity and for participating in the public life of the larger city. This role of religious organizations, combined with other factors, have led many researchers to conclude that a more appropriate model for today's immigration may be that of 'segmented assimilation' (Portes and Zhou, 1993; Zhou, 1997) in which preservation of immigrants' own values and promotion of national solidarity with the homeland are compatible with selected assimilation to American culture (Rodriguez, 1999). Under this model, religion has multiple social roles, and they are not contradictory in an era of global connectedness. The incorporation function is still a major social role of religion in the US. But since the mid-1960s, churches, temples, mosques, synagogues and other faith-based organizations, as well as community-based organizations that build on the religious affiliations of their members, have expanded their roles for many immigrants and their children as they become instruments to mediate between the country of origin and the country of residence, serving as one of the most important points of reference for individuals as they create multicultural identities (Levitt, 2007). The Salvadoran American National Association (SANA) based in Los Angeles (further detailed in the following) is a clear example of a reference point that helps immigrant families negotiate multicultural, binational identities. Through promoting faith-based activities that simultaneously encourage integration into American society and culture with preservation of Salvadoran culture and history, SANA demonstrates the process of segmented assimilation at work.

4 Religious diversity in Los Angeles

The diverse demographic landscape of Los Angeles and its varied religious cultures lend a sense of cultural flux and experimentation

often associated with California in the popular imagination. According to the Glenmary Research Center, there is no one religious group with which a majority (50 per cent or more) of Los Angeles County residents identify themselves. Roman Catholics comprise 40 per cent and Jews roughly 6 per cent of Los Angeles County's total population, but beyond these two groups, no other religious group contains more than 1 per cent of the county's total population, indicating that Los Angeles is home to a high level of religious diversity.¹ Among those who consider themselves adherents of a particular religion, approximately 69 per cent are Roman Catholic, 10 per cent are Protestant, 10 per cent are Jewish, 2 per cent are Muslim and 9 per cent are other.² Although Los Angeles' cultural milieu is usually depicted in secular terms, an unusual level of religious invention and reinvention has also been part of it. Thus, immigrants to Los Angeles do not enter into a climate of religious indifference or stability, but rather into one filled with diverse and active religious and faith-based groups (Miller *et al.*, 2002). Evidence from research also suggests that many immigrants are likely to embrace their faith tradition more firmly as a way of holding onto their cultural identity (Treviño, 2006). In Los Angeles, the relatively high tolerance for religion and religious variety, combined with the relatively high salience of religious belief and practice among many immigrants, creates a climate in which immigrants' faith traditions work as a stabilizing anchor in new surroundings (Hondagneu-Sotelo *et al.*, 2007b; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2008).

Los Angeles' high tolerance for religious variety and salience of religious practices do not necessarily indicate that all segments of the city's society embrace these new religious communities. While some may passively tolerate these incursions, others will often exhibit prejudice against 'foreign' religions or 'foreign' expressions of religiosity when they become aware of plans to build a temple, shrine, synagogue, church or mosque, or when they

start sharing their congregational spaces and rituals with some immigrant groups. Opposition can take the same NIMBY (Not-In-My-Backyard) form that, for example, a homeless shelter might encounter, accompanied by complaints about a threat to 'our way of life' (Mellen, 2007: 1).³ These debates are not merely parochial, as they can reach national and global dimensions, as in the case of the 2010 proposal to build a Muslim centre near 'Ground Zero' in New York City. Prejudice against immigrant communities is also expressed in violent forms at times, as some Muslims (and those mistaken for Muslims) have learned in the period following 11 September 2001. Although there are also differences from the Muslim case, Latina/o immigrants in the US have also faced aggressive forms of prejudice in recent years, including a rise in the number of raids and deportations as the anti-unauthorized immigrant climate in the country has increased, particularly following the mass marches of 2006 requesting immigration reform (Pulido, 2007). Indeed, in Los Angeles, Reverend Frank Alton of Immanuel Presbyterian Church (further detailed in the following) was the recipient of hate mail and antagonistic voice messages in 2007 disapproving of his congregation's actions in support of immigrant rights after a radio programme announced nationally that a pro-immigrant march would begin in front of the church's doorstep.

5 Immigration and religious activism

For the purpose of this study, the authors are adopting a broad definition of faith-based programmes that builds on Corbitt and Nix-Early (2003) and Ferguson *et al.*'s (2005) definition of faith-based programmes. As examined here, faith-based organizations refer to those that meet *at least* one of the following selection criteria: are centred within a church or congregation; focus on religion and/or are dependent on a formal religious institution; are independent of a formal religious institution and seek to serve the broader community outside of the congregation, whether or not the

programmes are centred in a congregation's building; receive funding from a religious institution; have staff and/or members of their board of directors who are clergy from religious institutions; are directed by an individual who is motivated by his/her faith, religion or spirituality; or use faith, religion or spirituality in the provision of services to their client population (Corbitt and Nix-Early, 2003; Ferguson *et al.*, 2005).

The Los Angeles area is home to an abundance of faith-based organizations. The Center for Religion and Civic Culture at the University of Southern California recognizes at least 8,000 congregations within the county.⁴ Many of these have organized non-profit agencies that work alongside the congregation to provide valuable social services and capacity-building activities to assist underserved communities. Although some may be small and informal service providers, many have learned advocacy skills and have expanded their out-reach to make a valuable contribution to the community.

Faith-based community organization represents a crucial venue of political engagement by and for immigrants, both important in its own right and as a point of entry for electoral participation. Immigrant organizing and participating in marches, protests and rallies often occurs through faith-based organizations. Despite this, faith-based community organizing 'remains rather unknown in academic circles but today arguably represents the most widespread movement for social justice in the United States' (Wood, 2005: 147). Fortunately, this is starting to change as scholars begin to examine the topic (notably see Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2008; Irazábal and Dyrness, 2010). In reference to Latina/os, Wood (2005: 155) points to the need to 'broaden our lens ... to understand all those non-electoral activities that hold promise to increase Latino influence and thus make American life more fully democratic'. In a 2002 study, Ammerman (2002) found that over 70 per cent of mainline Protestant congregations worked in informal

coalitions that advocated for policy change or implementation related to social programmes. Recent federal programmes that support faith-based initiatives have helped reveal and expand the anti-poverty work that some of the groups undertake (Wuthnow, 2004; Wuthnow and Evans, 2002). Both the participation of Latina/o immigrants in this movement and the impact that the movement has on their lives are significant. Wood (2005: 149) estimates that 'one-third of the Hispanic-dominant institutions (mostly churches) involved in faith-based community organizing are made up mostly of immigrants'.

Wood (2005: 153–54) exposes several reasons why he considers that 'Hispanic religiosity will shape the future of faith-based community organizing and American political culture.' First, their sheer numbers and geographic location will continue to expand Latina/os' political influence. In Los Angeles, Latina/os already constitute over a quarter of the electorate (Broder, 2005). Latina/os are poised to become the determinative vote in California's electorate by 2073, when they will reach 50 per cent, yet by 2030 Latina/os will comprise nearly 30 per cent of the state's electorate, Asians will hold 13 per cent and Whites just over 50 per cent (Myers, 2007: 145). However, if Latina/os perform at accelerated voting rates (for example, if their voting rates increase to equal those of native-born Whites of the same age group), Latina/os could become 50 per cent of California's electorate significantly sooner (*ibid.*). The possibility to achieve increased political weight helps explain the heavy push in recent years for voter registration and civic participation by and for Latina/os and immigrants, exemplified in the slogan of the 2006 pro-immigrant marches and rallies, 'Today we march, tomorrow we vote'.⁵ Second, the Catholic Church is one of the key institutions in the field of faith-based community organizing, and about 70 per cent of US Latina/os are Catholic. Lastly, the tension between socio-political values sponsored by

the majority of Latina/os (which are better represented by the Democratic Party), and their familial values (better represented by the Republican Party), can continue favouring non-partisanship or pan-partisanship strategies within faith-based community organizing, expanding their influence and broad-based appeal.⁶

While the beginning of the 21st century is certainly a heightened moment for religion and faith-based mobilizations for progressive politics in the US, their role as such is not new. On the contrary, there is a long tradition of political action for social justice on the part of Latina/o clergy and churches, particularly in the southwestern US in the last 150 years (Espinosa, 2005; Treviño, 2006). In particular, representatives of Catholic and mainline Protestant churches have a long history of social justice activism (Weigert and Kelly, 2005; Wuthnow and Evans, 2002). Their actions have led to important expressions in public space, a significant part of which has been devoted to the cause of immigrants. This moral and financial support to Latina/o struggles for social justice has increased since the 1970s (Espinosa *et al.*, 2005), and in general, religious agents are increasingly taking public stands on political issues (Djupe and Olson, 2007).

In particular, the prolonged federal debate on immigration reform policies during the 2000s has prompted leaders of the Catholic Church and religious groups of other denominations to publicly define the institutions' stance vis-à-vis immigration. For religious and other faith-based organizations, there is a moral call to take a stance on immigration, which religious activism has taken on in recent years. In this moral call for immigrant rights, religious and political activism are joined as two sides of the same coin centred in justice and a deep desire to treat right *all* of God's people. This form of religious and political activism has been noted in recent literature on morality politics (Campbell and Davidson, 1998; Olson *et al.*, 2003; Penning and Stortebom, 2007),

and indeed religion has been documented to be a significant player in morality politics (Meier, 1994; Olson *et al.*, 2003; Tatalovich and Daynes, 1988; Wald *et al.*, 2001). In recent times, religious leaders have felt a sense of urgency in defining a theology and plan of action regarding immigration policy, due to the backlash of actions against immigrants at the local level, represented by deportation threats and raids, separation of families, harsh labour conditions and difficult access to affordable housing, education, transportation and health care, among other conditions (Carpio *et al.*, forthcoming; Vázquez, 2006). The hierarchy of the Catholic Church, for instance, has presented a united and strong stance in favour of social justice for immigrants, from the Pope, to the cardinals, bishops and local priests. In Los Angeles, the largest Archdiocese in the US, Cardinal Roger Mahony, supported by Hebrew and Christian scriptures, announced in 2006 that if Congressional Bill H.R. 4437 passed, which would have criminalized undocumented immigrants and those, including clergy, who provided any assistance to them, his priests would not comply with it.

In addition to the Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles, several other civic and religious organizations in the Greater Los Angeles area have taken courageous stances in support of unauthorized immigrants and immigration policy reform. Due to its proximity to the US–Mexico border and its high number of both authorized and unauthorized immigrants, Southern California is a hotbed of immigration dynamics for the nation, and ‘ground zero’ of the anti-immigrant movement (Pulido, 2007).⁷ Within this context, religion and faith-based mobilizations have played critical roles in progressively responding to negative attitudes, actions and policies against immigrants. These mobilizations have also brought together immigrants and a broad-based coalition of supporters, effectively catering to their emotional, pastoral and material needs in times of distress and uncertainty and helped build a dialogue

centred in oneness over division (Irazábal and Dyrness, 2010). Religion in this context is ‘a sanctuary for coping; an arena for mobilization, civic participation, and solidarity; an ethical and moral basis for action; and possible resources for resistance and collective well-being’ (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2007b: 4). Religious activists not only seek greater inclusion for immigrants, but they also model a way to negotiate difference in an increasingly global and mobile world (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2008: 3). Furthermore, given the aforementioned factors that for decades have led to Los Angeles’ being an epicentre of immigration politics in the US (proximity to the US–Mexico border, size of its immigrant population and diversity of its residents, among other factors), the actions of these religious organizations and their broad-based coalition of supporters have had and will continue to have social and political impacts extending far beyond the Los Angeles region, across the US, and in some instances, reaching international audiences as well.⁸

III Religious and political activism to promote immigrant integration in the city of angels: two case studies

Within Los Angeles, there are many organizations and congregations that have been working to facilitate the integration of immigrants into society. From secular organizations such as the Central American Resource Center (CARECEN), National Day Laborer Organizing Network, El Rescate, Association of Salvadoreans in Los Angeles (ASOSAL) and Korean Immigrant Workers Alliance (KIWA), to faith-based organizations such as Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE), Jóvenes, Inc., Interfaith Coalition for Immigrant Rights (ICIR), Dolores Mission and others; these groups have provided a pathway for integration that continues to add to the ‘draw’ for immigrants of coming to Los Angeles. We choose here to focus on two such organizations: a religious congregation, Immanuel Presbyterian Church, whose members are ethnically mixed;

and a community-organizing network, the Salvadoran American National Association, whose roots are centred in Latino immigrant identity. These cases demonstrate how religion is actively promoting and aiding political engagement on behalf of and with immigrants in the workings of two different organizations. These organizations were chosen to explore the role of religion outside of the majority religious (Catholics) and immigrant (Mexican) groups among Latina/os in Los Angeles, whose dynamics have received more scholarly attention. In addition, the organizations were selected given the researchers' well-established relationships with some of their leading members. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the two organizations were selected for their ability, one as an explicitly religious organization and the other as an overtly civic organization, to demonstrate the interwoven nature of religious and political activism in the lives of immigrants in Los Angeles.

1 Immanuel Presbyterian Church

Immanuel Presbyterian Church (IPC) is located in a historic building along Los Angeles' Wilshire Boulevard in an area of the city known as Wilshire Center, which once was the epicentre of the city's financial district and a predominately Anglo area of the city, yet today is one of Los Angeles' more ethnically diverse neighbourhoods. According to the 2000 US Census, the residents living in the area immediately surrounding IPC are 46 per cent Asian, 34 per cent Latino, 11 per cent White and 6 per cent African-American (US Census Bureau, 2000). Residing at this location for over 80 years, IPC is more than 120 years old. In 1995, Reverend Frank Alton became Senior Minister of IPC, not long after Los Angeles, and Wilshire Center in particular, had been hard-hit in the 1992 Los Angeles Rebellion.⁹ Given the devastating impact of the riots on the immediate area in which IPC was located, as well as the violence that occurred during the riots between ethnic groups in that

neighbourhood (including ones that made up large portions of the church's congregation), Reverend Alton saw his new position at IPC as an opportunity to contribute to fostering a sense of healing and understanding between ethnic and cultural groups in the area. 'A lot of healing was needed in the inter-cultural mix. This congregation seemed well-situated geographically for that' (Alton, Frank. Personal Interview. 10 April 2008).

As the neighbourhood surrounding IPC experienced significant demographic shifts over the years, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s, so too did the congregation at IPC. In 1950, the church's membership numbered 5,000, by 1975 that number had dwindled to 2,000, and by 1995 it had dipped to 300, where it has remained steady.¹⁰ In 1950, the majority of the church's members were White; today, the congregation does not contain a majority ethnicity. The congregation's members are roughly 45 per cent Latina/o, 25 per cent Asian, 25 per cent White and 5 per cent African and African-American. Reverend Alton estimates that 60 to 70 per cent of the church's members are immigrants, 25 per cent of whom are undocumented immigrants. Of the congregation's Latina/o immigrants, Guatemalans are the largest subgroup, followed by Salvadorans and Mexicans (the remainder of whom are Hondurans, Panamanians, Colombians, Venezuelans, Ecuadorians and Nicaraguans), while Filipinos and Koreans constitute the largest subgroups of Asian immigrants (which also includes Chinese, Indonesian and Indian immigrants). The neighbourhood in which IPC is located is home to an ethnically mixed community containing residents of Korean, Mexican and Central American descent, who have resided in the area since the late 1970s and 1980s, and younger, often wealthier and single residents of White and Asian origin, who began to move into the neighbourhood in increasing numbers in the early 2000s. Thus, IPC is significantly more Anglo and less Asian in its ethnic make-up than its surrounding neighbourhood. As such, IPC

offers its members a more ethnically diverse milieu than that of the area in which many of its members live, and thus a chance to be part of a more ethnically mixed, integrated community than they might otherwise experience.¹¹

In 2007, IPC became involved in immigration as a political issue. The decision to become politically active has direct religious roots, stemming from a pastoral concern that became a political concern primarily engaged with immigration policy. Reverend Alton has found that his experience as a pastor of a congregation with a strong immigrant base does not give him the freedom to disengage, in spite of the fact that other pastors have advised him not to take a stance on political issues. In discussing the church's engagement with immigration issues, he says inaction is not a possibility: 'I have not found that to be an option I can do here. Neutrality is taking a stance' (Alton, Frank. Personal Interview. 10 April 2008). Yet the decision to engage in immigration policy was not without negative consequences for IPC; as noted earlier, Reverend Alton was the recipient of hate mail and phone calls in 2007 when he announced that a march in support of immigrant rights would begin in front of the church's doorstep. In addition to participating in that and other marches and events in support of immigration reform, IPC officially joined the New Sanctuary Movement (NSM) in April 2007, after being approved to do so by its session. The New Sanctuary Movement, as described by Irazábal and Dyrness (2010: 12), 'invites faith-based groups from across the country to offer refuge to undocumented immigrants in church, temple, or synagogue premises in a symbolic attempt to shelter them from arrest, detention, and deportation, and ultimately prevent what the group views as an unjust separation of families as a result of deportation'. Building from the Sanctuary Movement of the 1980s, in which thousands of refugees from Central America found safety and shelter in churches and other faith-based groups, the goal of the NSM is: 'to enable congregations to publicly provide

hospitality and protection to a limited number of immigrant families whose legal cases clearly reveal the contradictions and moral injustice of our current immigration system while working to support legislation that would change their situation' (New Sanctuary Movement, 2007). Since 23 July 2007, the IPC has had in sanctuary one of the NSM's four housed families: Yolanda, a Guatemalan immigrant, who is under an order of deportation, and her young teenage, US-born daughter who is now 19 years old. Since being in sanctuary, Yolanda has been visited by religious and civic leaders, including Los Angeles' Interfaith Communities United for Justice and Peace, whom she met within September 2010 at IPC and spoke of her gratitude for the shelter the church is providing her and the protection while venturing outside from being stopped and deported.¹²

The church's participation in the NSM, and immigration politics more broadly, is viewed by IPC's leadership as rooted in a religious motivation, yet one that carries the possibility of meaningful policy reform. Reverend Alton describes the NSM as a 'prophetic movement' that raises the possibility of some 'wobble room' to unglue 'how stuck the immigration conversation is in this country' (Alton, Frank. Personal Interview. 10 April 2008). Thus, IPC's actions in support of immigrant rights are motivated by religious values, yet also aimed at achieving policy results for and with immigrants. In being a sanctuary congregation, IPC depicts how faith and politics are deeply intertwined in matters of immigration. Reverend Alton describes the congregation's decision to become part of the NSM, in which IPC began a direct engagement with immigration politics, as a challenge that at its core is fundamentally religious: 'It is a challenge of faith that I think has raised the faith quotient and has made [the congregation] understand what is at stake with faith' (Alton, Frank. Personal Interview. 10 April 2008). Furthermore, this challenge brought forth by the congregation's involvement in

immigration as a political issue brings with it, as Reverend Alton describes, a faith impact on the community at large, immigrant and non-immigrant alike. In explaining the congregation's decision to participate in actions in support of immigrant rights and immigration reform and the impact of these actions on the larger community, Reverend Alton highlights a message of oneness and social integration: 'It occurred to me that anger divides and grief unites' (Alton, Frank. Personal Interview, 10 April 2008). Through engaging in a political activism that is also religious in its call to action, IPC is building a congregation in which immigrants are better integrated into the fabric not only of the church but also of the larger community in which they live.

Like other communities of faith in Los Angeles and around the US, IPC has acted on the moral call to take a stand on immigration issues, becoming politically engaged through a lens of religious conviction and an eye towards justice. When it comes to the issue of undocumented immigration and immigration policy in the US, the congregation believes that as a church they are called by God and Scriptures to something higher than even the church or the nation. As explained by Irazábal and Dyrness (2010: 4), '[T]hese are churches committed, in principle, to the construction of radical utopias of justice and love even in contestation to the state.' In effect, IPC's involvement in immigration politics is seen as an act of radical social justice. This dimension comes alive at the intersection of religion, politics and immigration, and has helped spawn a broad-based coalition of allies in support of immigrant rights and immigrant integration in the US. In addition, the decision by these communities to become involved in immigration policy is an exercise of deliberative democracy and consensus building (as well as spiritual self-actualization and soul-searching), as members are invited to carefully debate the theological and civic rationales for political involvement and gauge the pros and cons of such decisions before voting.

In addition to its deliberate engagement with immigration politics through participating the NSM and marches and events in Los Angeles in support of immigrant rights, IPC has a long history of intentionally fostering an environment within the congregation in which immigrants feel integrated into and supported by the church. For the past several years, IPC has operated within the church an Immigration Resource Center, which assists immigrants in understanding the immigration process and offers immigrants free legal counsel. In addition, IPC has members of its leadership committees who are unauthorized immigrants; Reverend Alton maintains that these positions of leadership within the church provide immigrants, both authorized and unauthorized, with a greater sense of social and political inclusion that they might otherwise feel: 'There has been a positive impact on their being accompanied, and to feel part of a congregation that welcomes them, accepts them, does not judge them, that sees them as equal human beings, that offers them leadership positions, and that does not look down on them. All of that is positive accompaniment' (Alton, Frank. Personal Interview. 10 April 2008). The positive accompaniment (*acompañamiento*) that immigrants experience at IPC has sometimes taken concrete, practical forms, including the creation of the Immigration Resource Center and the church's decision to offer specific worship services that focus on the issue of immigration. This accompaniment provides the church's members with a sense of community, and resonates in particular with Latina/o immigrants, whose primary religious background (Catholic) is filled with processions and rituals that are performed communally.¹³

Immanuel Presbyterian Church also functions as a centre of integration in the lives of immigrants through its thoughtful and ongoing prioritization of establishing a multicultural environment within the congregation. When Reverend Alton arrived to lead the

congregation in 1995, IPC was multiethnic in the composition of its membership but not necessarily multicultural in its practices: IPC's membership encompassed Latina/os from different countries of origin, as well as Koreans, Whites, Africans, African-Americans and other ethnic groups, but its religious rituals and cultural gatherings almost exclusively expressed White, Anglo-Saxon traditions and aesthetics. Since then, with the support of the congregation, Reverend Alton has made it a key priority to build a multicultural congregation in the midst of a strongly multiethnic neighbourhood. For example, in an effort to reach out to the neighbourhood's Korean community, which is a larger share of the area's population than of IPC's congregation, IPC has initiated a partnership with a nearby Korean congregation, Church of the Peace. The two churches participated in joint activities and in August 2008 their committees voted for the Korean congregation to move into IPC for two years, after which they will vote on a possible merger. IPC has also focused on the importance of language in creating a culturally inclusive environment. For over seven years, IPC has conducted bilingual services every Sunday in English and Spanish, which is known as the All Together Service, and the congregation pays for translation services during its leadership meetings, as 6 of the 15 members of the church's board in 2008 were Latina/os, 3 of whom were monolingual Spanish speakers.

Moreover, IPC has also underscored the value of cultural rituals in fostering multiculturalism. IPC, a member of the Presbyterian Church USA, has for 13 years conducted annual Posadas and Via Crucis, traditionally Catholic rituals that are extremely popular in many Latin American countries. Reverend Alton considers these religious celebrations as cultural events. He notes, 'Posadas and Via Crucis are gifts from the Latin cultures, and specifically Mexico, to the other cultures that are a part of this community.' The Head Pastor decided to introduce these events to

the Presbyterian congregation to help move IPC into a more multicultural milieu, 'My understanding of multicultural over multiethnic has to do with intentionally and mutually sharing culture, such that in a multicultural community, every group has a sense that pieces of their particular culture are honored and received as gifts by others' (Alton, Frank. Personal Interview. 10 April 2008). Culture is thus not only a gift to others but also a tool that helps immigrants feel – even if only every Sunday – that they are integrated into their new city and supported by a strong social network that values both their heritage and their presence as new members of one society.

2 The Salvadoran American National Association

Founded in 1999, the Salvadoran American National Association (SANA) is a Los Angeles-based non-profit community organization. SANA is structured as a 501c3 organization, and is directed by a Board of Directors, which includes a General Director (Mario Fuentes), Chief Financial Officer, Public Relations Officer, International Relations Officer and Community Relations Officer. The organization is run by 25 regular volunteers and up to 50,000 during its annual festival. SANA receives funding from small businesses in the Los Angeles community, private corporations, non-governmental organizations, individuals and churches (particularly around the time of its annual event, further detailed in the following, which celebrates El Divino Salvador, Christ). While independent from a formal religious affiliation and serving the broader community, SANA is a faith-based organization that meets the definition of faith-based organizations provided in this article; specifically, SANA receives funding from religious institutions, is directed by an individual who is motivated by his/her faith and uses faith or religion in its provision of services to the client population.¹⁴

While SANA does qualify as a faith-based organization, the mission and focus of SANA is one that is explicitly civic in nature. SANA describes itself as an organization for whom civic participation is a chief objective: 'SANA is a nonprofit, community organization dedicated to preserving Salvadoran history and culture for future generations while simultaneously encouraging the active civic participation of all Salvadorans.'¹⁵ SANA's mission again underscores its commitment to civic activism: 'To encourage an appreciation of Salvadoran American history and culture; celebrate our bi-national identity collectively; and, engage and transform our communities through organizing, positive visibility and representation.'¹⁶ Moreover, SANA's General Director, Mario Fuentes, explains that one of the organization's main goals is to highlight the positive contributions of Salvadoran immigrants to a broader US society and culture: 'We seek to raise awareness of the way in which Salvadoran immigrants contribute to the United States by sharing their culture and heritage with the diverse culture groups within the country' (Fuentes, Mario. Personal Interview. 13 August 2008).

Los Angeles is home to the largest Salvadoran population outside of El Salvador, and one out of every five Salvadorans reside in the US (Terrazas, 2010). Salvadoran immigrants are California's and Los Angeles' second-largest Latino immigrant group after Mexicans, and estimates of the Salvadoran population in Los Angeles range widely, from 800,000 by community estimates to the US Census Bureau's 2000 estimate of 273,000 (Watanabe, 2007). During the civil war in the 1980s in El Salvador, hundreds of thousands of Salvadorans came to the US, fleeing violence and persecution; many of these Salvadoran immigrants came to call Los Angeles their new home, and it was during this time that SANA was founded. Realizing that they were not going to return to their country of origin, a group of Salvadoran immigrants living in Los Angeles began to explore how to best

remain connected with El Salvador, while also integrating themselves into life in the US: 'We were wondering, how are we going to be most useful and effective in continuing our bi-national relationship with the country where we were born and where we were violently expelled from during the civil war years?' (Fuentes, Mario. Personal Interview. 13 August 2008). SANA's founding members engaged in that conversation for years, brainstorming how to best regroup and become civically engaged, visible and represented as Salvadoran immigrants now permanently residing in the US.

In 1999, SANA's founders decided to launch their project publicly, and established the Salvadoran Day Festival as a way to commemorate the day in 1525 when San Salvador, El Salvador was officially proclaimed as the *Villa de San Salvador*. The Salvadoran Day Festival, which takes place on the Sunday closest to August 6 of each year, features a hybrid programme of religious and civic events that demonstrate how SANA blends civic and religious activism to promote immigrant integration of Salvadorans in the US. The Los Angeles Festival has reached an annual attendance of over 50,000 participants, and cities throughout the US, as well as cities in other countries such as Canada and Australia have initiated their own festivals in celebration of Salvadoran Day that feature a similar programme of religious and civic components.

The featured highlight of SANA's festival is the celebration of the Bajada del Divino Salvador del Mundo, the commemoration of the Lord's transfiguration, where a human-sized statue of Jesus Christ, the Divine Savior, and perhaps *the* icon of Salvadoran identity, is carried in procession throughout the streets and ultimately is lowered into a globe where he is 'transfigured' – dressed in white garments – and raised once again out of the globe into the night air, to the shouts and claps of the crowd. For the Salvadorans present

at the procession and ritual, *La Bajada* carries a deep civic and religious significance that brings meaning to their journey to and residence in the US (Alfaro, 2004). In addition, Werner Marroquin, one of SANA's founders, describes that the support of churches was fundamental in SANA's being able to bring the statue *El Divino Salvador* from El Salvador to Los Angeles; while many of these congregations could not provide financial support to SANA at that time, they opened the doors of their churches to the statue, allowing immigrants from El Salvador to visit and connect with the image of Christ that had been brought from their homeland (Marroquin, Werner. Personal Interview. 23 September 2010). Through the Salvadoran Day Festival, which is often an emotional experience for many of its participants, SANA facilitates faith-based action for/with Salvadoran immigrants that aides them in their integration into a new life and a new society:

In July of 2000 the Salvadoran community in Los Angeles brought a replica of their sacred patron, *El Divino Salvador del Mundo*, [Divine Savior of the World] to Los Angeles. As the figure was carried in the back of a truck and paraded through the streets, people crowded around, wiping away tears and beaming smiles, as this transnational symbol of hope and peace came toward them (Miller *et al.*, 2002: 102). We watched as people processed up to the image, touching it, praying to it. I saw tears stream down the cheeks of one woman. Carefully I went up to her and asked her why this was so significant. Her response provoked deep emotion in me: she had migrated from El Salvador and had not seen her mother in 17 years. This Christ, the exact replica of the one back home, could transcend the space and bring them together again in some intangible, spiritual way. It had been kissed and blessed by her mother back in El Salvador before it embarked on the journey to Los Angeles. She could now pray and it would unite them. In some extraordinary, mysterious way, prayer helps this woman cope with the sorrow of being so far away.¹⁷

Mario Fuentes describes that from the outset, SANA has shared a strong relationship with churches and many other faith-based organizations in both the US and El Salvador. He explains that this relationship dates back to the arrival of hundreds of thousands of Salvadorans to the US during the civil war years: 'When we first came as refugees from El Salvador in 1979 and 1980... it was the houses of worship – and I would not just say churches, because it also included temples and other communities of faith that do not call themselves churches – but the houses of worship welcomed a lot of us' (Fuentes, Mario. Personal Interview. 13 August 2010). Fuentes continues, 'We owe a great deal to the American religious community, our very own lives' (Fuentes, Mario. Personal Interview. 13 August 2008). The efforts by these churches to respond with inclusionary action and take in Salvadoran immigrants in the 1980s who were fleeing the civil war and had no other place to turn to became known as the Sanctuary Movement, in whose roots and spirit the NSM has been founded.

Thus, at the core of the immigrant experience for many Salvadorans lies a connection to communities of faith and, in many instances, to religiosity and religious doctrine. This strong connection between religion and the historical experience of immigration has helped create and continues to birth political alliances among immigrants, their supporters and faith-based organizations. Perhaps in part due to the political and material support Salvadorans received from a wide array of faith communities during the 1980s, most of SANA's events are explicitly faith-filled and intentionally multi-denominational. Despite the organization not being affiliated with a particular faith, religion is at the centre of many of their events: 'We cannot conceive of the celebration of Salvadoran Day Festival without the religious component. There is no way' (Fuentes, Mario. Personal Interview. 13 August 2008). At the culmination of the religious ceremony in the 2008 Salvadoran Day Festival,

100 white doves were released into the sky, symbolizing both the peace the Salvadorans have struggled for since the country's civil war days and the Holy Spirit (in the form of a dove), a symbol of Christian tradition.

Moreover, keeping true to its mission to encourage the active civic participation of all Salvadorans, SANA also incorporates civic and political elements into the Salvadoran Day Festival. In Los Angeles' celebration, political and civic leaders, as well community members who have made an outstanding contribution to the Salvadoran community, are honoured throughout the festival. Significantly, the 2008 Salvadoran Day Festival featured one of the candidates running for President in El Salvador, thereby bringing an overt political activism to an event, which is at the same time centred in religious action. Moreover, the theme of SANA's 10th Anniversary Festival, 'Today we celebrate, tomorrow we vote', strongly demonstrates that for SANA, as is the case for many other pro-immigrant, civic and faith-based groups, religious action and political action are interwoven strategies on the path to achieving justice and love for all. In addition, through providing Salvadoran immigrants with leadership roles in the organization, SANA further functions to help promote immigrant integration for Salvadoran immigrants; indeed, Salvadorans are leaders today of many faith and civic organizations in the Los Angeles area, including the Central American Resource Center, the Association of Salvadorans in Los Angeles, the Salvadoran American Leadership and Educational Fund, Clínica Monseñor Romero and many others. Thus, in its efforts to serve the Salvadoran immigrant community and assist in their adoption to US society, SANA utilizes both civic and religious activism as a means of engagement.

In describing key allies in the political struggle for immigrant rights that many of SANA's constituents face, SANA lists churches and communities of faith, both in the US and El Salvador, first, followed by non-governmental organizations, universities, unions and political

groups, all of whom are connected by a shared and deep sense of justice and respect for the other, the outsider, the immigrant. Like members of IPC and the NSM, there is a moral call to action, centred in justice and love, which motivates members of SANA and its allies to engage immigration as both a moral and political issue. Indeed, for SANA's constituents in Los Angeles, immigration is *the* political issue. Although SANA, as a 501c3, cannot directly lobby for immigration policy, it conducts voter registration and citizenship drives, Get-Out-The-Vote campaigns, and is involved in other efforts to promote civic participation and education, in addition to its annual event of faith and civic significance. In explaining the importance of the festival carrying this simultaneously faith-oriented and politically-active message – much like Reverend Frank Alton's comment, 'anger divides and grief unites' – Fuentes adds, 'It is easier to destroy and divide than to build' (Fuentes, Mario. Personal Interview. 13 August 2008). Hence, in the rhetoric and actions of these faith-based groups, there is a moral motivation towards creating unity over division, and religio-political activism is a strategy to achieve this oneness, this integration for and with the immigrant community.

Through its religious and political activism, and its strong focus on creating a bi-national identity for Salvadoran Americans, SANA also helps to integrate immigrants into the social, cultural and political fabrics of Los Angeles. The Salvadoran Day Festival helps immigrants feel more integrated into Los Angeles by providing them with a sense of belonging, highlighting the importance of celebrating publicly in fostering immigrant integration. The founders of SANA believe that the lives of Salvadoran immigrants in the US generally lack the social networking that individuals need to sustain themselves and this is why they appreciate the moments of celebration in a public context where their own history, culture and values are highlighted and promoted as their contribution to building a sense of community with others in

the US. And by repeating the ritual every year they not only reinforce their own Salvadoran identity, but they also draw in immigrants from other Latin American countries who similarly identify with a Christ who has crossed borders like them, who is now transcended, who brings hope and who unifies them in one moment of social and spiritual community-building; in fact, the image of *El Divino Salvador* was referred to as 'Christ of the Immigrants' when it was brought from El Salvador to the US, and as such, attracted immigrants of diverse backgrounds to the houses of worship in which it was displayed (Marroquin, Werner. Personal Interview. 23 September 2010).

Furthermore, the promotion of a bi-national identity (honouring El Salvador *and* the US) is one of SANA's main agendas, further highlighting the organization's dedication to help immigrants settle in the US. SANA's Mario Fuentes describes this goal of bi-national identities as one centred in multiculturalism: 'to live within and co-exist within both cultures' (Fuentes, Mario. Personal Interview. 13 August 2008). Fuentes continues, 'We have started a journey through SANA that will hopefully bridge those two cultures, those nations, through bi-national identity' (Fuentes, Mario. Personal Interview. 13 August 2008). This desire to promote bi-national identity emerged from within the group's leadership as the leaders began to realize that their community's well-being was linked to rooting their identity not only in their homeland, El Salvador, but also in their new land, the US. This form of immigrant immigration promoted by SANA, IPC and similar organizations is more akin to segmented assimilation (further described earlier), in which a connection to the customs and cultures of countries of origin are maintained, integration into the new country is supported and multiculturalism is celebrated. SANA views its youth as the legacy of this multicultural identity, and the organization is incorporating young people into its leadership in an effort to strengthen the presence and potency of Salvadoran American bi-national

identity both in the US and El Salvador. Salvador Gomez Gochez, another one of SANA's founding members, describes this integration of the Salvadoran community into the social fabric of the US which SANA seeks to achieve through its strategic and instinctive blend of political and religious action, as a deliberate goal: 'We want to open a window to the public and say, "We are here"' (Watanabe, 2007).

IV Observations and conclusions

The exploration offered in this article of the interface of immigrant integration and religious and political activism in Los Angeles leads to the following observations and lessons. First and foremost, for the case studies of pro-immigrant organizations and immigrant communities presented in this article, religious and political activism are deeply connected as part of an interdependent strategy to achieve just immigration policy reform and respect and improve the lives of millions of immigrants and their families throughout the US. Furthermore, religious and political activism by pro-immigrant faith-based groups are not only struggles to gain human rights for all, but also to help immigrants become integrated into their new lives in the US. Through prioritizing cultural, and specifically multiculturalism or bi-nationalism in their religious and political, events and practices, these organizations help forge a new immigrant identity that helps immigrants feel better integrated in their new surroundings yet also connected with their countries of origin.

Moreover, there are special circumstances that prompt religious and civic leaders to get involved in politics at the local level. The research behind this article supports the notion that a sense of urgency and acute struggle inflicted by the discrimination of immigrants in one or more members of the community are salient factors in mobilizing religious and civic leaders of immigrant-based constituencies. In these constituencies, mobilization is often compromised by a sense of fear derived from

immigrants' unauthorized status, and thus the decision by religious and civic leaders to take political action is a pivotal step in engaging entire communities. For immigrants engaged in SANA or at IPC, the institutions offer a space and environment in which their causes are welcomed and they are provided with a sense of legitimacy, moral rationale for their actions, protection and *acompañamiento*.

The role of leadership and of individual and institutional capacity-building to expand the effectiveness of efforts for immigrant integration cannot be overemphasized. When there is a heightened sense of threat and urgency, such as under the current political circumstances in the US and the world vis-à-vis immigration dynamics and policy-making, inter-faith coalitions and non-religious social justice coalitions can be strategically grown and strengthened. This is a critical moment for leaders to focus not only on addressing the crisis at hand, but on devising strategies of effectiveness and expansion for supporting a sustained engagement on matters of social and political struggles for justice, even in times of less threatening or needy circumstances. As the number of voters of foreign-born origin grows in the country, they will be increasingly courted by political leaders; and the visibility, role and power of faith-based mobilizations will also increase. Moreover, as society increasingly becomes more diverse and the political agenda for civic and cultural rights becomes larger and more complex, there is a sensible need to work on capacity-building that can help ensure the creation and sustenance of a just society for all.

In addition, religious mobilizations for social and political aims come in many flavours, and research on immigrant, faith-based mobilizations must better take note of and interpret the types of activities that immigrants, and particularly unauthorized immigrants, are more prone to participate in, given their particular vulnerabilities. The religious and political activities of immigrants are less in the

realm of formal electoral politics (the common indicator and proposed method of action accounted for by most studies of religious civic involvement), and more apt to occur in the realm of informal politics, including the provision of social services, protests, marches, rallies, religious rituals (which often include covert political commentary), discussion and education groups, and occasional attendance at public meetings.

Dispelling popular impressions that most faith-based organizations and mobilizations in the US are socio-politically conservative, such as those embodied in commonly used political terms (for example, 'The Religious Right' and 'Evangelical Voters') and statistics (for example, President Bush's having won 79 per cent of the Evangelical vote in 2004) (Cooperman and Edsall, 2004), this article also shows that progressive religious individuals, groups and coalitions can be important allies to progressive planners and policy makers in advancing social justice for the disenfranchised. Furthermore, this article shows that there is a broad base of support for the advancement of social justice for immigrants in the US. Specifically, immigrant congregations, Catholic and Protestant alike and Latina/o and non-Latina/o alike, faith-based leaders and other allied groups can expand their power and effectiveness by reaching out and building coalitions in three directions: with secular pro-immigrant and Latina/o organizations, interdenominational groups, and interracial and interclass groups. There are also important opportunities for cooperation across national borders with the counterpart leaders and organizations of immigrant-sending communities (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2008; Levitt, 2007).

Through an interdisciplinary methodological lens, the agenda of research and action suggested here aims to reveal a politics of expanded citizenship for the traditionally disenfranchised (Ramírez, 2005). This agenda is particularly critical as immigration continues and immigration policy reform has not been

resolved in Congress, remaining polarized at local and state levels (Carpio, Irazábal and Pulido, forthcoming). Thus, immigration politics will undoubtedly remain a critical site of struggle for social justice at the local, regional and federal socio-political level and a part of the cultural-religious landscapes for years to come.

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the support of the University of Southern California's Provost Initiative on Immigration and Integration and the Center for Religious and Civic Culture for this project. This article also evolved from comments received at the 2007 USC Seminar 'Visualizing Religion' and the 2007 Conference of the Associations of Collegiate Schools of Planning.

Notes

1. Based on the Glenmary Research Center database (2000) collected and published by Dale Jones.
2. Ibid.
3. An example of this was when the First Congregational Church in Long Beach was told that the homeless were not allowed to camp out on the church's property and asked the church to 'abate the nuisance' or face the possibility of daily fines up to \$1000/day (Mellen, 2007).
4. Based on the Glenmary Research Center database (2000) collected and published by Dale Jones.
5. The slogan proved true, when in the US presidential election of 2008, 3 million more Latina/os voted, as compared to the election of 2004.
6. However, the explicit anti-immigration actions and rhetoric of some representatives of the Republican Party alienated many Latina/os in the 2008 presidential election.
7. Unlike pro-immigrant supporters, those participating in anti-immigrant activism are generally not motivated to do so by their faith. This is not to say that anti-immigrant, faith-based groups do not exist on an individual congregation or leader level, but there is not a unified coalition of anti-immigrant, faith-based supporters engaged with religio-political activism that is similar in its significance to the coalitions of pro-immigrant, faith-based groups.
8. In 2006, a Catholic church in Paris, France posted on its community bulletin board articles from French newspapers depicting the 2006 pro-immigrant marches and rallies in Los Angeles. One of the authors of this article visited this church in Paris, France in June 2006 and photographed the church's bulletin board.
9. The 1992 Los Angeles Rebellion (also known as the 1992 LA Riots) began on 29 April 1992 when four LA Police Department officers were acquitted of charges in the beating of African-American motorist Rodney King. Riots occurred in the LA area for six days following the verdict of the trial, causing \$1 billion in property damages, 53 deaths and thousands of injuries. Riots began in an area of Los Angeles known then as South-Central, yet quickly spread to other areas of the city, including to the Wilshire Center area, which was particularly hard-hit in the riots by looting, assault and arson and fighting among ethnic groups.
10. This is not to say that religiosity in Los Angeles has dwindled since the 1950s, but rather that the ethnic diversity that was introduced during the second half of the 20th century to a majority White, Protestant 1950s Los Angeles, brought with it religious diversity that has led to a growth in the number and origin of places of worship in the city.
11. Estimates of IPC's size, ethnic composition and undocumented immigrant population are taken from a personal interview with Reverend Frank Alton at IPC on 10 April 2008.
12. Grace R. Dyrness, co-author of this article, attended this meeting at IPC.
13. See Roberto Goizueta (1995) for an excellent explanation on how these types of rituals help build Latino identity in the US.
14. Information on SANA is from a personal interview with Werner Marroquin on 21 September 2010.
15. Taken from website of Salvadoran American National Association (SANA). Retrieved on 2 August 2008 from: http://sanavision.us/pages/about_Us/about_us_welcome.html.
16. Ibid.
17. Reference from 'Bearing witness: Women in cities as agents of transformation for God' by Grace R. Dyrness, which will appear in 'Cities and women's health: Global perspectives' (working title), University of Pennsylvania Press, edited by Afaf Meleis of School of Nursing at the University of Pennsylvania, and Eugenie Birch and Susan Wachter of the Penn Institute for Urban Research (Penn IUR). Estimated publication date is March 2011.

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