

Liderazgo en Conjunto: A Leadership Development Model for the Twenty-First-Century

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The leadership challenges of Latinx Episcopal congregations echo broadly in US churches and institutions of all types, as they seek to adjust and respond to rapid change. Leadership and organizational theories from the public sector have been adapted and applied to congregational settings. This study identifies elements of these theories in play among Latinx priests ministering in the Episcopal Diocese of New York as they address leadership issues in congregations challenged by organizational change and transitioning neighborhoods. Their strategies emerge from a Latinx cultural paramountcy on community and justice values, described here as liderazgo en conjunto, and are a model for adaptable leadership that is responsive to the gospel mandate to work for justice.

Los desafíos de liderazgo de las congregaciones episcopales Latinx tienen un amplio eco en iglesias e instituciones de todo tipo en los Estados Unidos que buscan adaptarse y responder a cambios rápidos. Teorías de liderazgo y organizacionales del sector público han sido adaptadas y aplicadas al contexto congregacional. Este estudio identifica los elementos de estas teorías en juego entre lxs sacerdotxs Latinx que ministran en la Diócesis Episcopal de Nueva York al abordar los problemas de liderazgo en congregaciones desafiadas por cambio organizativo y vecindarios en transición. Sus estrategias surgen de una importancia cultural Latinx de los valores de comunidad y justicia, que se describen aquí como “liderazgo en conjunto,” y son un modelo de liderazgo adaptable que responde al mandato del Evangelio de trabajar por la justicia.

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The social impacts of globalization, migration, and gentrification inherent in the demographic shifts in the US are acute realities of Latinx¹ Episcopal ministries, their communities, and the leaders called to minister to and with them. They are a challenge to traditional strategies for creating community, for equipping and serving leaders, and for growth in health, resources, and number. The leadership challenges of Latinx Episcopal congregations echo broadly in US churches and institutions of all types as they seek to adjust and respond to rapid change. In the public sector, leadership and organizational theories have emerged in response to this changed and changing environment. These, in turn, have been adapted and applied to congregational settings. This study identifies elements of these theories in play among Latinx priests ministering in the Episcopal Diocese of New York as they address the same leadership issues present in congregations challenged by organizational change and transitioning neighborhoods. The strategies of these priests incorporate elements of systemic organizational theories, but emerge from a Latinx cultural paramouncy on community and justice values, described here as *liderazgo en conjunto*, to build on the *teología en conjunto* of Latinx theologians.

Some Leadership Theories Engaging Change

A great deal of study has focused on quality leadership for institutions facing difficult challenges. Texts that describe the characteristics of strong leaders share similar lists. Well-known leadership researchers Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner's "The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership Model," for instance, describes core practices that are present in other leadership models.² When leaders are at their best, they embody five core practices: they model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart.³ These practices reflect values shared by other leadership

¹ A term used for communities in the US of Latin American origin (across generations) responding both to the gendering inherent in Spanish, and the desire to be inclusive of persons whose identities do not conform to the gender binary assumed by the dominant culture. It is an intentional inclusion of members of the LGBTQIA community.

² James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge: How to Make Extraordinary Things Happen in Organizations* (San Francisco: The Leadership Challenge, 2012).

³ Kouzes and Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 15.

models: shared supportive leadership that learns together, and is empowered to question and challenge assumptions in order to discover what works best for the constant change and flux in organization and society. A systemic understanding of organizations is most useful, as systems are not static, and a systemic analysis of organizations is imperative for adaptability and responsiveness to community and organizational change.

It is common to hear pastors of Spanish-language congregations lament the challenges of developing and sustaining leaders when the community and the people are constantly changing. At the conference *Latinx Studies for a 21st Century Church: A Conference on Episcopal Cultures*,⁴ after presenting on this topic, a pastor asked the question, “How do we keep our leaders? I work with a team of leaders and just when we have a strong team, key families move, usually for better work.” The short answer to this question is you must always prioritize making leaders that make more leaders, in an ongoing organic process. However, the mobility of the Latinx community, and the development and redevelopment of neighborhoods to increase housing, investments, and tax bases, create an ever-changing context in which Latinx clergy are called to serve. Many Spanish-language congregations are located in underresourced communities that contend with underemployment and unemployment, inadequate and insufficient housing, and poor access to medical care and good schools. Families that have immigrated to provide a better life for their children work hard, and as they are able to improve their economic situation, they relocate to live in more stable, resourced communities. All of these challenges of shifting populations, strained community resources, and debilitated institutions impact sustainability and growth. This ministerial context requires leaders that can respond to rapid change. Therefore, secular business and nonprofit organizational leadership models that provide strategies to deal with these social and economic realities have been adapted and adopted for use in congregational settings. Older mechanistic and hierarchical leadership models are challenged by the ongoing transitions of organizational life. It is counterproductive to set structures in stone and count on a team that will implement those processes, when the people, the situations, and the contexts are always changing.

⁴ *Latinx Studies for a 21st Century Church: A Conference on Episcopal Cultures*, October 11–13, 2018, Seminary of the Southwest, Austin, Texas.

Congregational leaders have utilized some models more frequently, making them popular ways of addressing the challenges they face. Some models adopted in congregational settings seek outright transformation of cultural power dynamics present in older leadership models, while some models emphasize a holistic perspective, seeing the organic interactions of different parts of the ecosystem. This systemic approach offers leadership models that take into account the rapid pace of change that defines society today, and the impact of constant change on people and their interactions. These organizational leadership models are interdisciplinary, drawing from developments in fields as diverse as biology, physics, psychology, and education. They share the goal of strengthening the individual as part of a whole, thus influencing and impacting change. In the context of church, these processes are meant to transform and heal.

Transformational leaders inspire commitment to a vision and also develop followers into leaders who will take on the mission as their own. This is done through rich, positive role model relationships with followers.⁵ This type of leadership has been shown to be especially effective in nonprofit and volunteer organizations, and the process of transformation is not only characteristic of the process, but also the goal of leadership. Transformational leaders often must identify and address power dynamics and structures that limit the possibilities and opportunities of the disenfranchised to thrive. In this model, the formation of leaders is itself an empowering, transformational process that builds on the experiences of nascent leaders, evoking their strengths, and providing opportunities to learn tools of analysis, reflection, and networking to design strategies for change. These models are operative in liberative pedagogies that are rooted in the seminal work of the Brazilian popular educator Paulo Freire, and community-organizing models that build on the father of community organizing, Saul Alinsky.⁶ Freire's model of learning/teaching, where all participants bring shareable knowledge that can be built on for the greater learning of the group, including those identified as leaders/

⁵ Ronald E. Riggio, Bernard M. Bass, and Sarah Smith Orr, "Transformational Leadership in Nonprofit Organizations," in *Improving Leadership in Nonprofit Organizations*, ed. Ronald E. Riggio and Sarah Smith Orr (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 49–51.

⁶ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2000); Saul Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals: A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals* (New York: Random House, 1971).

teachers, engages, supports, and strengthens the leadership of church members, both lay and ordained. These church leaders engage their congregations and communities, and through dialogue and reflection, analyze these contexts for a possible response, identifying and learning the skills necessary to respond in a positive, transformative way. The ongoing process of reflection and praxis supports continuous learning for ministry in a changing context, and models shared ministry and shared power. Latin American *comunidades eclesiales de base* (basic ecclesial communities) reflect this pedagogical theory of learning that focuses on the agency of the community and its indigenous leaders as the source of life-giving social transformation and shifts in power dynamics that work for justice.⁷

In a similar way, community organizers gather people to name and collaborate over a shared concern, and together explore and learn through the analysis of their particular context, the power systems at play, and the strategies that can be deployed, to leverage their “organized” power for change. Through various community organizing efforts, church communities throughout the country have used their collective power to address inequities and disparities detrimental to their communities’ lives. They have addressed the issues impacting poor communities everywhere: insufficient and inadequate housing, poorly performing schools, neighborhood violence and police brutality, food deserts, and high unemployment and underemployment.⁸ Congregations have, together with members of the broader community, participated in organizing for change in their communities. Understanding change dynamics can benefit leadership for change within their congregations, especially the process of coming together to gain perspective, study the context, and analyze strategies to affect change.

⁷ Descriptions of the base ecclesial communities in Nicaraguan theologian Ernesto Cardenal’s *The Gospel in Solentiname*, 4 vols. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1976–1982) and *Love in Practice: The Gospel in Solentiname* (London: Search Press, 1977) inspired many in US congregations to practice shared gospel reflection, engaging social injustice with the hope of liberation for the oppressed.

⁸ The Industrial Areas Foundation/IAF, founded by Saul Alinsky, is the most well-known faith-based community organizing group (<http://www.industrialareasfoundation.org/>). There are many others, among them Faith in Action, formerly known as PICO national network (<https://faithinaction.org/>); Gamaliel National Network (<https://gamaliel.org/>); Interfaith Worker Justice (<http://www.iwj.org/>); Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice/CLUE (<https://www.cluejustice.org/>).

Family Systems Theory, and other psychological and organizational leadership theories rooted in biological systems theories, apply organic systems models to individuals, families, organizations, and communities. The individual exists as part of a greater whole and is influenced by the role they play within the whole and the dynamics among the various parts. Leaders must therefore be conscious of and engaged with the larger view of the organizational system, reflecting on the forces and interactions at work to position themselves to impact the system for positive, healthy growth and change. Edwin Friedman, rabbi, family therapist, and leadership consultant, adapted Bowen's Family Systems Theory to congregational life in *Generation to Generation*,⁹ a text widely studied by those engaged in, or preparing to engage in, congregational ministry. This systems approach recognizes the role and impact of the leader within the congregational system, as well as the impact of the system on the leader. It challenges the understanding of leadership that calls for a quick, decisive fix for congregational problems, and instead calls for the leader to be self-aware, differentiated, nonanxious, and present with those reacting to the anxiety generated by change in the system. This leader is able to support the congregation as it deals with change, and encourage others to rise to the challenge change and growth presents, and not regress in response to the difficult emotional fields activated among members who desperately want a return to homeostasis, the status quo. This challenge, to function differently, to grow, learn, and adapt to change, is also addressed in systems scientist Peter Senge's *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* and leadership development leader Ronald Heifetz's *Leadership without Easy Answers*.¹⁰ Senge's emphasis on the mission and purpose of an institution as the organizing principle for the system and its leaders invites leaders to learn together as a team, to challenge assumptions (mental models), and through dialogue to create and communicate a vision for the organization. The leaders are challenged to see themselves as part of a system, always clarifying their place in the system, their vision, and their perspective (self-mastery). Heifetz also emphasizes the importance of leaders shifting from an emphasis on quick technical fixes to becoming adaptive leaders that can take a

⁹ Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1985).

¹⁰ Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Doubleday, 2006); Ronald A. Heifetz, *Leadership without Easy Answers* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1994).

broader view (from the balcony) and support the system in its need to change. He describes the many forces working against change, and the importance of leadership that is adaptive and works for change and growth in an organization.

These pedagogies and formation methodologies are employed in theories of leadership development and social change and have been adapted and adopted in the church. Heifetz and Friedman inform congregational development discussions, theories, and strategies for leadership; this kind of adaptive and nonanxious leadership is applicable to the life of congregations facing change, both in their work and in the wider context. How do these models interface with the leadership practices of Episcopal Latinx congregations? What are the implicit and explicit leadership strategies being deployed in these transitional congregations seeking growth and health? Having originated in and been applied to the business community and dominant culture congregations, do these theories and models apply in a different, Latinx cultural context?

Leadership Teams and Liderazgo en Conjunto

Whether in a transformational leadership model or a systems theory model, working in a team is always ideal. The work of human and community development at the heart of liberatory pedagogies is communal by definition: small group work, community organizing work, and reflection groups. Leaders learn together and from each other, pooling their knowledge and experience; they engage the community or the issue, and come back into their small groups to reflect upon what they tried, what they learned, and what strategies they might employ next to continue the work of transformation and community/social development. Systemic approaches recognize that long-lasting change and growth cannot happen or be sustained without multiple people working in concert. A critical mass committed to change is required to impact cultural change in an organization. Leadership teams, then, are important for effective sustainable change and growth in an organization or movement.

In Latinx theological circles, some theologians reflect the cultural value of family and community in collaborative projects doing theology together, *teología en conjunto*.¹¹ This theological methodology

¹¹ A text that reflects this collaboration: Jose David Rodriguez and Loida I. Martell-Otero, eds., *Teología en Conjunto: A Collaborative Hispanic Protestant Theology* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1997).

incorporates the diversity of the Latinx community. The diversity is complex and nuanced, and intersects culture, language, migration experience, class, history, and theological roots. Thus, collaboration in Latinx communities always requires an awareness of the many aspects of *latinidad* present in the shared task and an artistry in respecting and integrating them. The product of research and reflection is strengthened by the variety of perspectives, and the product is richer in the same way that an orchestra or *un conjunto* (a musical ensemble) offer depth because of the contrasts of sounds and rhythm. Many Latinx theologians name, explore, and expand on this methodology in their writing and research. It is beyond the scope of this article to engage *teología en conjunto* and its contributions to theological and ecclesial study; however, this methodology is named here because it is reflected in the approach to leadership and organizational development utilized among Latinx clergy in this present study, and elsewhere in The Episcopal Church. Their approach to leadership development reflects the cultural value of the communal versus the individual, which is intentionally integrated as they engage the critical work of inclusion, adaptation, and flexibility critical to serving in these fluid contexts. The ability to respond nimbly, creatively, and with strength is greater in a collaborative team, *en conjunto*. *Liderazgo en conjunto* speaks to the multicultural, multilingual, and multigenerational character of Episcopal Latinx congregations. As leaders engage and are present with people in transition, living in communities and a church in transition, they are strengthened by explicitly calling forth the wisdom and knowledge base of these various communities brought together in worship and ministry. Yet this might only represent team leadership in a particular cultural context.

Naming this leadership strategy and value *liderazgo en conjunto* reflects the commitment to and prioritization of justice and prophetic ministries in many Latinx Episcopal congregations. Working as a team is not only more effective and sustainable, it expresses a value for collective power and social transformation rooted in the prophetic tradition of Latin American liberation theologies, the heart of Scripture, and the liberative, transformative ministry of Christ. The interviews that follow reflect a consistent understanding of lay leadership development that activates the gifts and leadership potential of members of the congregation, whose lives and interactions are changed. Leadership development is expected to impact the successful and sustainable ministry of the congregation, as well as potentially transform the

leaders into change agents in their communities away from church. The priests believe that the agency exercised within the congregation will impact the agency exercised at the workplace, in families, and in neighborhoods.

The Context: Episcopal Latinx Leaders in Transition

To explore the strategies Episcopal Latinx leaders employ to challenge and change congregations, and the usefulness of leadership models dominant in the wider church, seven clergy in the Diocese of New York were interviewed about leadership. These Latinx bilingual leaders had arrived in their congregations in the three years prior to the interviews (2015–2018). In each instance, the clerical transition that led to their call was fraught with conflicts. The beginning of their new ministries reflected a clergy turnover in half the Latinx congregations of the diocese, and in one instance resulted in the creation of a new Latinx worshiping community that joined and changed an existing English-speaking, predominantly white congregation. The clergy participating in this study are culturally diverse, and vary in years of ordained experience, as well as time served in the Diocese of New York. They all identify as Latinx themselves, representing Colombia, Dominican Republic, Honduras, and Puerto Rico; three are women and four are men. Three came from outside of the diocese to take their posts; others are originally from the diocese, although one spent a short time outside it and moved back to take her current post. Their tenure as ordained priests range from two to twenty-seven years.

The seven congregations are representative of the contextual diversity of the diocese: three are located in two of the boroughs of New York City, while two are located in large suburban cities in Westchester County, one in a historic city in Orange County (ninety minutes northwest of New York City), and one in a rural community in Dutchess County (ninety minutes northeast). The rural congregation is the youngest, formed in 2010. The rest of these congregations have been doing ministry with Latinx populations in Spanish for twenty to forty years.¹² Four of the congregations provide worship and ministry in Spanish only, while the other three congregations provide them in English and Spanish. In each case, these bilingual, multicultural

¹² J. Gordon, "EDNY History of Hispanic Work: An Anecdotal History of Work with the Hispanic People within the Diocese of New York," the New York Diocesan Archives.

congregations' leadership structure has evolved so that Spanish-speaking leaders serve on the vestry, some for multiple years, and each parish is striving to live into an identity of being one multicultural church that worships in two languages. The ministries referenced in the interviews for this article were specifically the Spanish-language ministries of these congregations and their Latinx leadership teams. The congregations' cultural diversity includes (although not limited to) immigrants from the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Peru, Puerto Rico, and El Salvador.

Interview Process Described

The questions invited clergy to assess the status of the lay leadership team upon their arrival, the leadership theory reflected in their style of leadership, the goals they had for their leaders' growth and development, and how they planned to achieve those goals. Specifically, the questions for the *liderazgo en conjunto* interviews were the following:

1. How would you describe the leadership when you arrived and what clues did it give you about how leadership was or was not shared between clergy and laity?
2. How would you describe your long term/ultimate goal around leadership development in your congregation?
3. What process do you envision for responding to the gap between what is and what is hoped for?
4. How would you describe your leadership style/theory?
5. What, in your opinion, is the place or role of team leadership in a congregation?
6. Anything else you would like to add?

The conversations were rich. The interview data could be analyzed in many ways to help identify some of the many challenges facing Episcopal congregations in general, and Latinx congregations in particular. Clergy found that there was a great need for formation: Christian formation, spiritual formation, leadership formation. The overall goal of several priests can be summarized by the priest who shared, "I am offering trainings and workshops on different church matters . . . off site, half-day and day-long workshops, and overnight retreats. . . . These are followed up with sermons and small group

study and discussion on the same topics.”¹³ This need for formation is shared by many congregations, and it impacts not only the ability to share leadership, but also the sustainability and vitality of the congregation.

Although the contexts, years of the congregation’s Latinx ministry and cultural mix, and the cultural diversity and experience of the priests varied, there were many similarities in their analysis of the current state of leadership and their goals and methodologies for developing and strengthening the congregations’ leaders. Most notable was a shared commitment to doing ministry *en conjunto*. They expressed a vision of congregational leadership as shared by clergy and laypersons, and saw the current leaders in need of development to move beyond a hierarchical, “leader/priest knows best” leadership model. Each priest understood their role as agitator (Freire), teacher, coach, and role model, important to the critical work of lay leadership development. The laypeople in each context varied widely in their understanding and adoption of an Episcopal identity, but whether the laypersons had been involved in the congregation a long time or were just getting to know The Episcopal Church, the work of building leaders that could be part of leadership teams was central to the priests’ understanding of their task as clergy leaders responsible for the formation of members and development of leaders. The equipping and empowering of lay leaders to engage the challenges facing the congregation and the wider community in a shared, collaborative process was the goal of each of these clergy leaders. Their strategies varied slightly, reflecting the operative model of analysis and their methodology of leadership development, but they share a definition of good leadership as *liderazgo en conjunto*.

Latinx Priests’ Interviews Confirm Systemic Approach to Ministry

The open-ended questions led to a broad discussion that was not intentionally focused on particular theoretical constructs, allowing each priest to describe their leadership strategy in their own way. The central leadership concepts reflected in the models popular in seminary and congregational settings were present, however, in the clergy leaders’ understanding of their current congregational context

¹³ Interview with the Rev. Adolfo Moronta, Iglesia La Gracia/Grace Church, White Plains, NY.

and the needs of the laypeople in leadership roles. Reviewing their answers in light of the leadership development perspectives reflected in the aforementioned models, the interviews were analyzed utilizing the following questions:

- Do the priests look at the congregation in a systemic way, and see leadership as dynamically interacting with forces and people that impact the functioning of the congregation?
- How do they identify, inspire, and cast a vision for the community?
- How do they describe the team/*conjunto*'s development, operation, and role in promoting and sustaining change in the organization?
- What practices do they employ as leaders to support change and growth among the leaders and the organization as a whole?
- What other images, models, and theories do they employ in their work of providing and developing leadership in the congregation?

In each instance, the priests analyzed the congregation systemically. They described the congregation as a dynamic interactive entity, where different forces and issues impacted the life of the whole, and each member in particular. Although they raised issues that needed to be addressed, primarily the development and empowerment of lay leaders, they did not see these as inherent in particular people or personalities, but rather as how the community was organized as a whole and how certain experiences and practices impacted the ability of leaders to adapt, engage, support, promote, and integrate change. The description of the systems varied: a family system, a community organization, a multigenerational system interacting with historical and current social forces and dynamics, a community shaped by a culture where hierarchy is assumed as the best leadership model, and as an organism, wherein the parts interact and impact each other.

Each priest was very conscious of certain group dynamics driven by fear of change, with one priest trained in Family Systems Theory describing the congregation explicitly as an anxious system. One priest, a social scientist/professor, described the system in terms of social/group dynamics as described in social psychology. Fear of displacement among older members, fear of loss of power, position, or

prestige, was described as driving some of the energy that could erupt in conflict among leaders. Another priest described gate-keeping behavior, where information and access were not shared with “newer” members, because to be a leader was to wield power, and knowledge is power. This was also seen as reflecting a sense of scarcity that did not allow for new ideas or projects to be considered because there would not be enough energy, authority, or money to do or consider additional things. Triangulating and autocratic behaviors were also described as reflective of fear and anxiety about change.¹⁴ One priest described the power issue as one of laity in need of empowerment. They were accustomed to one person holding power and authority and restricted themselves to following orders or assisting, not as those who can have responsibilities and authority over ministries. “When I arrived, I didn’t find leadership, there were patterns of power. . . . Leadership was about having power over the others, not truly listening and reaching out to people.”¹⁵ As a community, this priest wanted to see the leaders challenge these power dynamics and take on responsibility and authority as a shared activity, where the emphasis is not on “a leader” but on a group of leaders that work together to achieve goals. This, in this priest’s opinion, would reflect the transformative function of the Christian community in a society with unjust power distribution.

Each priest also understood that casting and holding up a vision of the mission and goals of the congregation is their responsibility. They identified various interrelated sources for the vision they held up to the community. Some explicitly challenged their members to name the needs and hopes they had for their community, and to communicate the needs and hopes of their neighbors, in this way shaping the vision for the community. Others similarly said the mission of the church is defined by the needs and hopes of the community broadly defined (both congregational and in the wider community), some choosing to do this work through needs analysis of the community as part of a shared clergy-lay project, along with an inventory or identification of the gifts and passions of the membership. Others felt that they, along with two or three key leaders, provided the initial

¹⁴ For an in-depth discussion of emotional triangles in relationship systems, see Edwin H. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix* (New York: Church Publishing, Inc., 1999), 204–28.

¹⁵ Interview with the Rev. Loyda Morales, Iglesia del Mediador/Church of the Mediator, Bronx, NY, November 5, 2018.

vision for the community's ministries based on their assessment of its needs and hopes, and that this would be broadened and or sharpened as others engaged in the visioning process. In each instance, the church was understood as existing to serve not only its members but also the wider community, some primarily providing service and care to those in need, while others explicitly said the church is called to lead in social transformation through the activity and ministries of the members. "Who is around us, how do we include them, how do we include? . . . [We] should be living like we are here for the people that join us, our very reason to be."¹⁶ None of the clergy saw the vision casting as their purview alone, and all saw the ministries or work of the church as encompassing the neighborhood where they are called to serve. Yet each found that this concept of community needs that inform the vision and mission of the organization needed to be articulated and clarified. In most settings, lay leaders assumed that vision casting was the task of the clergy leader based on the authority of their office, and their role as pastor and teacher in the congregation. In one instance, a key leader, who had been central in sustaining the remnant of the congregation after a difficult departure of the previous clergy, responded to the new priest's questions regarding vision of ministry for the community by saying that as a priest, he should tell them what they should do. She had looked forward to a new priest coming so she could step back from her responsibilities and was frustrated that she was being expected to participate in decision-making by the new priest.¹⁷

Although in each instance clergy and lay leaders held the expectation that ministry is shared, the priests reported that lay leaders were reticent in exercising their authority as partners in ministry. Lay leaders functioned as team members, where they were tasked to help or carry out the plans prepared by the clergy leader. In a couple of instances, where clergy leadership was absent or compromised for a long period of time, a lay leader, or competing lay leaders, had taken, or were in contention for, the central role usually identified as the priest's. This key leadership role was seen as holding the authority to make decisions about what and how things would be done, and other

¹⁶ Interview with the Rev. Gladys Diaz, Misión San Juan Bautista, Bronx, NY, October 6, 2018.

¹⁷ Interview with the Rev. Juan Perez-Correa, La Misión de Santiago Apóstol (La MESA), Dover Plains, NY, October 5, 2018.

"leaders" were responsible for carrying out these decisions. In these circumstances, lay leaders, without much consultation or discussion, made decisions or supervised how things were carried out with little engagement of others on the vestry or on ministry teams. The congregation deferred to these lay leaders, and in some instances, multiple groups existed, each siloed in their ministry/work area, not collaborating or in conversation with other leaders. "*En cuanto al liderazgo, noto lo que aprendí de las pandillas*, it is territorial inside the church."¹⁸ In the congregations where this dynamic was active and had been active for multiple years due to absent or compromised clergy leadership, the arrival of the new priest, initially welcomed, turned into a tense conflict of leadership styles and expectations as the priest introduced an expectation of shared/collaborative processes and decision-making. The power struggle led to a break in the relationship between clergy and lay leaders.¹⁹

This hierarchical model is not uncommon, but it is not in concert with the shared ministry implied in *liderazgo en conjunto*, or the role of lay ministry expressed in the baptismal covenant and the catechism.²⁰ The hierarchical leadership structure established the priest as one to be deferred to or confronted, leading to acquiescence or conflict. There were no practices or processes in place that invited a sharing of ideas, or authority and leadership. Instead, clergy found that respect for their authority meant that laypeople did what the priest asked them to do.²¹ In each instance, the clergy interviewed sought a model of team leadership that was more collaborative, more characteristically *en conjunto*. One priest described it this way: "There might be a silent leader waiting for the opportunity. . . . One person said to me, 'Father I had never had a responsibility, nor thought that

¹⁸ Interview with the Rev. Dr. Luis Barrios, Santa Cruz/Holyrood, Manhattan, NY, October 6, 2018. (Translation: "As to leadership, I notice what I learned from gangs . . .")

¹⁹ This dynamic was present at Misión San Juan Bautista, Bronx, NY; Misión del Buen Pastor, Newburgh, NY; Iglesia del Mediador/Church of the Mediator, Bronx, NY; and Santa Cruz/Holy Rood, Manhattan, NY.

²⁰ Episcopal Church, *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church: Together with the Psalter of David according to the Use of the Episcopal Church* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), 293–94, 855.

²¹ These challenging practices, and others, are described in the seminal and still-too relevant book by the Rev. Dr. Juan Oliver: *Ripe Fields: The Promise and Challenge of Latino Ministry* (New York: Church Publishing), 2009.

I had the capacity to be someone. I always felt that because I wasn't educated and formed I had no place in the church,' but now she is the leader responsible for the flowers in the church and feels that she can fill this role, she is quick to say, 'let's go,' which is great, that she doesn't do it on her own but is inviting others to join her in the work, seeing it as a team project."²²

Strategies Employed to Foster Liderazgo en Conjunto

Given these realities, the learning, practicing, and modeling of new collaborative leadership styles was a priority for each of these priests. The strategy for leadership formation varied based on how each understood and characterized the congregational system. Several priests placed a high premium on formal learning opportunities: workshops, training events, and conferences.²³ These provided an opportunity for laypeople to step away from the congregational context and learn with lay leaders of other congregations the basic essentials of their congregational roles and responsibilities. Learning from and with other lay leaders was important in order to de-emphasize overly parochial identity, to learn what activities and programs were being explored in similar contexts, and to reinforce their identity as congregational leaders. Most of these congregations had limited participation in diocesan-wide or regional training and retreat opportunities, and participation increased under the new clergy leadership. Learning alongside other lay leaders facing similar challenges of congregational change provided support to lay leaders in their own context. They no longer saw change as inappropriate, but instead as something being done in all congregations interested in growing spiritually and in service to their community.

Each clergy person expressed the centrality of dialogical processing of issues, concerns, program ideas, and decisions as a learning tool. To value the gifts and perspectives of each person engaged in ministry requires practicing listening to each other and integrating the contribution of each member into the decision-making process. Establishing these processes as the way to build consensus and collaborate toward the shared goals for the congregation was central

²² Interview with the Rev. Rigoberto Avila-Nativí, Misión del Buen Pastor, Newburgh, NY, October 8, 2018.

²³ Interview with the Rev. Alejandra Trillos, Iglesia San Andres, Yonkers, NY. Also emphasizing this priority: Rev. Avila-Nativí, Rev. Diaz, and Rev. Moronta.

to the shifting of the culture of leadership present in each context. Priests found it critical to insist upon transparency of decision-making. When issues were brought to them for solutions, or programs brought to them for approval, they were instead redirected to the appropriate committee or to the vestry for discussion and resolution. In some instances, the degree to which this was critical became apparent because casual conversations or questions asked in passing were later reported as decisions or requests made by the priest that must be implemented or obeyed. Although some procedural matters could be clarified and directed in the moment, even these were then reported or presented for the team, so that all would share the same information and be enabled to support each other in ensuring compliance or continuity of practice. "It has been very difficult for them . . . [to accept] that we have to make decisions with transparency, have a meeting, discuss recommendations, see what all folks can work towards together."²⁴ This transparency of process and information and shared decision-making through dialogue was also a means to increasing shared responsibility for the impact or ramifications of decisions.

Clergy reported a need to increase collaboration on projects so that learning, especially through errors, was seen as a shared. "The role (of team leadership) is to be the critical consciousness of the congregation: we are here to work for the benefit of all, and if there are failures or weaknesses, how do we get to constructive criticism, not that 'you did,' but to speak of 'us?'"²⁵ Evaluation of the impact of programming or procedural decisions was part of the learning, with an emphasis on the importance of experimentation and learning from mistakes or unintended consequences. In each instance, clergy needed to emphasize that learning together through experience was essential for the church's growth and for the maturation of leaders. Blaming, scapegoating, and avoidance of negative feedback from the congregation was unnecessary. Working together as a team meant planning and implementing to the best of their ability and then learning from the evaluative discussions what they might do differently the next time. This shift was difficult, and clergy found themselves motivating leaders to take risks, knowing that it was the only way to

²⁴ Interview with Rev. Morales.

²⁵ Interview with Rev. Avila-Nativí.

move the project forward, and emphasizing that they should all support each other and learn how to work together to better face the next challenge.

Key to keeping leaders motivated was the clergy person as model and coach. Clergy emphasized that they, too, were engaged in learning. They spoke in terms of “us” and “we” and participated in hands-on projects and activities. In this way, they could model leadership as engaging in the work, not simply directing others in it. In one instance, a priest described the need to model patience and inclusion as each member, based on their capacity, was invited to participate in a project so that no one was on the sidelines, commenting or critiquing. As this occurred, the priest would gently ask questions that encouraged self-reflection about the engagement, inclusion, or support of others. Each described leading projects and seeking to consistently work alongside another person, emphasizing patiently working together. One priest shared that as they watched leaders working patiently to share what they had learned with others, they were able to see the leadership development of the lay leaders at work.

Clergy also saw preaching and pastoral care as important tools in their leadership formation. In order to surface hidden tensions and model transparency, it was critical for them to be able to name and theologize about difficult issues facing the congregation from the pulpit, especially as they began to address issues of growth, welcome, and inclusion, and then provide opportunities for people to respond, whether through dialogue sermons, small group discussions, Bible study, or in one-on-one conversations. As topics were studied and reflected upon in theological ways, the biblical nature of the team leadership concept was highlighted, as was the importance of working together to serve and transform communities. Teaching and preaching about gospel values were opportunities for holding up a vision of the church grounded in the gospel.²⁶ Priests did not seek success and growth for their own sake, or for the building up of individual members or groups, but in order to live into the purpose of the community gathered in Christ’s name, living into the values and practices of the gospel. This allowed congregations to broach difficult subjects of inclusion of LGBTQ neighbors, the equality of women’s leadership, and stewardship as a spiritual practice. In some instances, there were setbacks in the conversation, but re-emphasizing the values of

²⁶ Interviews with Rev. Diaz and Rev. Dr. Barrios.

the gospel and the call to welcome and serve continued to guide the conversation.

In each context, the priests shared their need to use pastoral care as a tool for leadership development because their communities were under siege, feeling threatened by the social climate, especially the anti-immigration sentiments that dominate the news and social media. Supporting and encouraging families, many of whom were under a great deal of stress because of their varied immigration and documentation status, was necessary, because this stress impacted their ability to function as leaders of the congregation. One priest shared a memory of the panic that went through the congregation because of the testing of the “presidential alert system.” Seeing an official alert on their phones threw families into a panic, not knowing if this was a raid notification, or if their families were being targeted for deportation.²⁷ In other instances, the domination deployed by some seeking compliance or cooperation in church projects impacted women from families with a history of domestic violence, and for yet others, the insistence on shared leadership was seen as a threat to the one place where they could claim some power, other areas of their lives being characterized by turmoil, crises, and powerlessness. In each of these instances, pastoral care was necessary to support leaders who were fearful and grieving. Clergy practiced a ministry of pastoral presence, relieving anxiety and assuring members in crisis of the support of the congregation and the pastoral leader.

Liderazgo en conjunto in the context of these Latinx models of team leadership lent itself to the image of a team and captain for the relationship between lay members and clergy. Yet even these were seen as operating in rotation. Depending on the project, different leaders were encouraged to take the lead as captain of a particular project.²⁸ Although this was a slow learning process, the hope was that in this way folks who took the lead would not be left without support when things were difficult, and all participants would take ownership of the projects being implemented, whether they were taking the lead or not. All the priests articulated their role as teacher-learner. In their new context, they, too, were learning about the congregation and the surrounding community. In most cases, especially since most of the clergy had been in the diocese prior to this call, the priests knew

²⁷ Interview with Rev. Trillos.

²⁸ Interview with Rev. Perez-Correa.

something of the context, but they made it clear in conversation with leadership that their full understanding of the context and its needs was evolving as they learned their role as leaders of the congregation. Emphasizing that each brought knowledge and gifts to benefit the ministry they shared meant emphasizing that each was learning from, and teaching, each other. In images of the body and its members, as read in Paul's epistles, the priest emphasized the importance of each member to the health, full expression, and functioning of the body. When it is understood as a community developing its mission together, the priest serves as teacher, coach, trainer, encourager, exhorter, and agitator, calling for lay leaders to do the same for each other and in their work with members of the congregation. The clergy emphasized the importance of sharing what they were learning with other members of the congregation, and listening to learn from them as well. Listening, engaging, and inviting into active ministry was not only for those who had specific titles or responsibilities, but rather an aspect of how the whole community functioned in order to carry out their mission as a congregation.

Spiritual Grounding for Leadership Formation

As stated above, the systemic approach to the congregational system varied among these clergy. Some contexts were defined as anxious systems, others as communities with sociopolitical dynamics that could be addressed to increase transparency, ownership, and responsibility, or organized to leverage transformative power within the congregation, in the community, and in the congregants' lives outside of church. In each instance, clergy understood there to be a critical need for Christian formation in formal and informal ways, and that it was their responsibility to impact the system in ways that promoted growth and collaboration. All of the leaders interviewed also shared the understanding that the transformation of the church members, and their maturation as leaders, would impact the various communities of which they were members.

They also understood and described congregational systems and their processes in theological terms. Each said it was essential that the congregation was a learning community of formation. The discipleship of each member was central to their development as leaders, their identification as disciples, and the congregation as a community of learners being formed and shaped by their relationship with Christ

and one another for life-giving transformation in the world. Ongoing learning through preaching and Bible study provided the images of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12–31), ministry as shared work (Luke 10:1–2), and the bearing of fruit reflecting spiritual health and maturation (Matt. 7:17–20). Other gospel images not mentioned by the clergy but reflected in their description of their pastoral work also come to mind, such as the bearing of one another's burdens (Gal. 6:1–5) and comforting one another with the comfort we ourselves have received (2 Cor. 1:3–4). Each clergyperson understood the primary issue of leadership development as one of forming mature disciples who understood their leadership in the church not in social or political or even communitarian terms, but that they were members and leaders of this particular organization whose purpose is sacred, part of the divine work of renewing the face of the earth (Ps. 104:30). The most challenging issue to the growth and effectiveness of congregational leaders was the importation of values, models, and strategies from other parts of their lives that were in conflict with gospel values. Each priest described this practice, whether the challenge came from a workplace where a person was not valued or was actively demeaned and oppressed; or from community/political work, where power for its own sake was the highest value and was wielded over others; or from home environments where political and social policies threatened or patriarchal models oppressed. All of these ways of being with one another violate the primary value of loving one another as Christ loved us, and needed to be reshaped in light of the gospel, with patient consistency, pointing out the incongruence of their behavior and the purpose and vision of the church as an institution.²⁹ The liberative and life-transforming mission of the church is to be experienced and practiced among the leadership as it is lived out in the congregational context and as it impacts their ways of living outside of the church. Each priest in their own way understood that this was the work of leadership development that would support the development of a *liderazgo en conjunto*. Without leaders having a clear understanding of the identity and mission of the church as charged with proclaiming the gospel in all areas of their lives, especially in the way they were servant leaders in the congregation, the possibility of working as a team would be limited at best. It is therefore not surprising that

²⁹ Especially and explicitly identified in interviews with Rev. Diaz, Rev. Dr. Barrios, Rev. Perez-Correa, and Rev. Avila-Nativí.

each priest utilized models of learning reflective of Freirean liberatory pedagogy.

Leadership Models Applied

Freire, as an educator grounded in Christian theology, shares values with those engaging adults in leadership formation: transformative empowerment that builds on knowledge, is primarily grounded in experience, and values power sharing for effecting change in the community. Working with church members called into leadership, these clergy encouraged critical reflection in dialogue as they were presented with the issues confronting the congregation. The priests posed questions that invited the laity to question the dominant narratives about how power functioned among believers: What do you think are the needs of the congregation? The community? What have you done/tried before in response to these needs? What did you learn from that process? What does the gospel say about this? What is the Christian response to the challenges facing us? Why are we doing this and how should we do this as church? Why do you think you reacted or responded as you did? How might you have reacted or responded differently? These questions modeled the belief that laity were capable of answering the questions they traditionally thought priests should answer. Together they could then seek answers from the gospel, the congregation, the community, and other neighborhood leaders, and together discuss and reflect on them, analyzing their context and their own perspective and gifts as together they made a plan responsive to the issues confronting them. One of the priests, a trained social worker, utilizes the Functional Approach to Social Work Practice,³⁰ which also uses questions in dialogue to strategize a plan, including identifying ways to overcome obstacles in order to achieve identified goals, supporting individual development within one's context. These pedagogical methodologies assume what is necessary is critical engagement of the issue or context in a process that evokes possible responses, which are then explored and acted upon. The experience garnered is also reflected upon, examined, and utilized in the development of next steps. The experience of the priest in these processes

³⁰ For a general description of the Functional Approach to Social Work, see "The Penn Approach," University of Pennsylvania Social Policy & Practice, Master of Social Work, accessed December 1, 2018, <https://www.sp2.upenn.edu/academics/master-of-social-work/the-penn-approach/>.

varied, and came from different types of formation as community organizers, teachers, social workers, case workers, spiritual directors, pastoral caregivers and counselors, and coaches. In each instance, they listened intentionally to learn from the leaders' narratives, their experience, their understanding of church theology, ecclesiology, and missiology, and their understanding of their role in the congregation, to formulate questions that led to a deeper exploration and analysis in response to the situation or decision at hand in order to develop a plan of action for engagement. Each priest understood that this type of leadership formation was slow and ongoing, but hoped that as the leaders themselves became experienced in this methodology, they would apply it to their leadership in small groups and with projects in the congregation and the community, in turn raising up and forming additional leaders. As a *conjunto* they will impact the culture of the community, shifting it from one that reflects oppressive uses of power and leadership to one that models liberative uses of power and leadership for life-giving transformation.

Characteristics of Leadership Models Employed

The Senge concept of a learning organization is also evident in the clergy leaders' understanding of the change required, and the process necessary to achieve it. The ongoing nature of leadership development, as well as the reality of the fluidity present within the congregation and the transitory nature of the community, calls for a method of leadership development that is ongoing and becomes characteristic of the organization itself. The need to question the why and how of practices implemented in light of the vision and mission of the organization must become "the way things have always been done" in order to respond creatively to the context and the ongoing need for change. This identity as a learning organization is useful for an organization whose purpose includes the formation of disciples. To understand discipleship as ongoing learning and growing into a Christian identity that is primarily concerned with personal, communal, and social transformation creates a learning organization that continuously reflects on what it is doing and its grounding in the gospel.

The centrality of the concepts of growth, health, and vitality as a product of transformation, and the role of leaders in catalyzing for change, is present in each of the priests' goals for the leaders in their congregations. This understanding of leaders engaging in community, and therefore in social change, is reflective of community-organizing

models of leadership development. Only some of the priests identified community organizing as the type of strategy they employed with their leaders, especially as they seek to study and name the issues impacting the quality of life in their community and analyze the obstacles and the resources available to leverage change. But the basic principle of organizing a community to build power deployed for change was shared by all the clergy. Also clear was the importance of ongoing leadership development through organized action, and the engagement of each person in identifying and supporting the development of new leaders. This, too, is an emphasis found in Alinsky-based community organizing models.

Each clergy leader also understood their role to be a model of how to function as a healthy and effective leader. They intentionally maintained an engaged, consistent, and confident stance in their capacity as the leader of a group that learned and practiced whatever was necessary to move forward toward the achievement of their shared goals and mission. This was reflected in how clergy described the process of leadership formation. Functioning as a non-anxious presence that modeled healthy engagement, avoided triangulation, and practiced transparency in the group process is the critical role of a leader in an anxious system, which these congregations are, given the change, challenges, and conflicts operative in their context. This understanding of the congregational system as family system, an organic whole seeking to maintain homeostasis, is central to the Friedman leadership framework, where this perspective supports the leader's work for change in the face of resistance. As Heifetz shows, the ability to maintain perspective and understand the function of resistance as a need to reduce discomfort brought by change, especially in a system that has been operating the same way for several decades, strengthens the position and functioning of the clergy leader. Each of the priests interviewed, while admitting that the work is difficult, understood their goal as long term, and articulated the need for a systems perspective to resist the temptation to personalize and be overly entangled in the various resistance behaviors present when organization growth and change is sought.

Conclusions

These Latinx priests, grounded in their communities, applying leadership theories and strategies rooted in Latin American liberation theologies, popular education, and systems organizational theories,

are forming congregational leaders for what is described here as *liderazgo en conjunto*. This group of Latinx clergy in the Diocese of New York have been practicing a model that reflects the tradition rooted in Latinx and Latin American models of theology and ministry, even as it engages more mainstream models. *Liderazgo en conjunto* is particularly effective for ministry in many Latinx congregations, given the quickly changing social contexts and particular challenges faced by so many of these congregations. This type of *liderazgo* applies effective strategies for organizational change to a diverse community, with varied gifts, unified in its commitment for justice for the Latinx people the clergy seek to serve. *Liderazgo en conjunto* provides a powerful model of Christian leadership that can support the difficult work of ministry for Episcopal, and other, churches in the twenty-first century.

Leadership theories that have been popular among congregational leaders and the institutions and organizations responsible for their formation provide useful frameworks for clergy dealing with leadership formation in Latinx congregational contexts. These theories are not all being referenced directly, but their principles are operative in the processes being applied to the challenges of Latinx congregations in the midst of great change. These clergy leaders called to serve in congregations in the Episcopal Diocese of New York during the last three years are engaging their contexts with an understanding of the congregation as a system subject to dynamics and forces that impact its capacity to engage and work within the ever-shifting context in which the clergy are called to minister. As these priests seek to support the growth and formation of lay leaders that value and can work *en conjunto*, their goals embody those core practices identified by Kouzes and Posner as central to good, effective leadership. Their strategies seek to build a team that can model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart.³¹ The work of building a community of leaders whose experiences and gifts are brought to bear on the hard tasks of growth and change necessary for Latinx congregations leads them to utilize pedagogical principles operative in liberatory pedagogies and community organizing. Their need to support people who are not only experiencing the challenges of leading an organization through change, but are also themselves living through anxieties and trauma of an immigrant community under siege, calls forth the best of

³¹ Kouzes and Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 15.

their pastoral arts, serving in a ministry of presence that is rooted and sustained by gospel values and faith.

The usefulness of these frameworks outside the dominant culture in the US may be due to the fact that they primarily suggest processes for addressing and working in challenging times and circumstances. They are not programmatically prescriptive. Instead, they call clergy leaders to listen carefully to the reality being lived and experienced by their lay leaders and then to build on that, guiding them with pastoral compassion and a clear vision informed by the gospel mandate to be in beloved community with one another and to help shape their congregations and its ministries to reflect those same values of love, compassion, justice, and service. This can be accomplished in culturally appropriate ways by culturally experienced and competent leadership. This is especially true when it is done understanding that congregations form disciples because they are communities of learning and formation, and that both clergy and laity are in this lifelong learning and formation process. All are being formed, first as believers and then as leaders who can share their understanding and gifts in order to live into a shared vision.

I am grateful for the willingness of these priests to engage in this study on leadership with me. Our conversations and our ongoing shared ministry are indeed a labor of love *en conjunto*. Together we form, but also call for, communities of study and learning, where these important issues of congregational leadership can be explored, and where each is built up and strengthened for the ongoing, challenging work of preaching and living into the good news of Jesus Christ for our communities today. We, and our communities, are being transformed by the power and with the guidance of the Spirit to work for justice and live into our identity as the inclusive, beloved community of Christ.