

Immigration and the Episcopal Church: An Ever-changing Face

DAVID L. DANNER*

Today's Episcopal Church actively seeks to minister to the rapidly growing number of immigrants to the United States in ways respectful of their culture. The church not only warmly invites these newcomers to join the faith community, but also addresses immigrants' physical, social, and emotional needs, and often serves as a community advocate for the rights of immigrants. This welcoming approach stands in distinct contrast to the attitudes and practices prevalent during the middle decades of the last century, when little heed was paid to immigrants. Yet, the hospitality extended to immigrants today finds its antecedents, now largely forgotten, in the domestic missionary efforts of the Episcopal Church during the second half of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century.

The commitment of today's Episcopal Church to minister to the needs of immigrants is seen in the work carried out through the church's Ethnic Ministries staff, representing Black, Asian American, Latino/Hispanic, and Native American ministries, as well as its refugee programs. Not only are the social concerns of immigrants addressed, but immigrants are actively evangelized in ways respectful of their culture. This approach demonstrates a significant shift in the thinking of many Episcopalians. A closer look at the Episcopal Church's immigrant ministry reveals a rich and complex history. Indeed, today's commitment to support new Americans and encourage their incorporation into the body of the church finds its roots in the commendable work of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During this period the church exhibited hospitality to immigrants and ministered

* David L. Danner is Rector of All Angels by the Sea Episcopal Church, Longboat Key, Florida. This study grows out of his interests in genealogical research and the nineteenth-century immigrant experience.

to the unchurched among them through the establishment of numerous ethnic congregations.

In the years immediately following World War I and continuing for the next half-century, a far less welcoming attitude toward immigrants prevailed. Indeed, elements of this anti-immigrant bias continue to shape the national conversation on immigration yet today. Those middle decades reflected the triumphal nationalism of an age that witnessed two world wars followed by unparalleled power and prosperity. Legislative changes in the 1960s opened the door to an influx of new immigrants, prompting the church to reexamine this neglected ministry.¹ Much of what has been learned in the last four decades is not really new; it had just been forgotten.

Just as it is impossible to write the history of the United States without considering the impact played by immigration, so, too, immigration has played a key role in the growth of the Episcopal Church. Nevertheless, it remains a subject that receives only limited attention. Most pastoral and evangelistic work with immigrants has been carried on by parishes and individuals, with national and diocesan offices often playing a secondary role. Thus source materials are preserved in a variety of formats, from unpublished parish histories to journals of the General Convention, and are scattered across a wide spectrum of jurisdictions. Although the full story of immigration's impact upon the life of the church lies far beyond the scope of this article, this brief review of the Episcopal Church's involvement with immigrants offers readers important background information to help them understand current debates. More important, it illustrates the progress the church has made in incorporating new Americans into the faith community, a work still to be completed. The Episcopal Church today remains 92 percent white, 4 percent black, 2 percent Latino, 1 percent Asian, and 1 percent other, while the United States as a whole is only 70 percent white, but 12 percent Latino, 11 percent black, 3 percent Asian, and 3 percent mixed.²

¹ The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, otherwise known as the Hart-Celler Act, abolished the National Origins Formula that had been in place in the United States since the Immigration Act of 1924.

² "Report of the Standing Commission on the Mission and Evangelism of the Episcopal Church," *Report to the 77th General Convention, Otherwise Known as The Blue Book* (New York: Office of the General Convention of the Episcopal Church, 2012), 500.

Initial Responses to Immigration

A massive wave of American immigration began in the 1840s with large numbers of Irish refugees from the Potato Famine, dissidents escaping the failed European revolution of 1848, and hordes just seeking greater economic opportunities. Walter Herbert Stowe, writer, statistician, and historiographer of the church, estimates that the total number of immigrants in America's first seventy years (1776–1846) was less than 1.6 million, whereas the country's population in that period grew from 3 million to 21 million. In other words, during this period, immigrants accounted for less than 8.8 percent of the nation's population growth.³ In contrast, the period between 1840 and 1890 witnessed the influx of some 14.7 million immigrants, chiefly from northern and western Europe. Of this number, more than 80 percent were, respectively, from Ireland, Germany, and England.⁴

What was the relative strength of the Episcopal Church until 1890 and what impact did immigration have on it? Stowe further estimates that in 1830—the first year that reliable statistical data are available—the ratio of total population to communicants was 416 to 1. That number dropped to 308 to 1 in 1840, and continued to decline every decade, reaching 118 to 1 in 1890. Therefore, despite the large increase in the immigrant population, the share of those claiming adherence to the Episcopal Church increased from 1 in 416 in 1830 to 1 in 118 just sixty years later. In numerical strength, membership rose from 30,939 in 1830 to 531,525 in 1890. While those numbers look impressive on the surface, Stowe argues that the burgeoning number of immigrants created conditions unfavorable for the growth of the Episcopal Church.

Although the Episcopal Church's relative strength showed an increase of 108 ratio points between 1830 and 1840, the growth ratio continued to decline steadily every decade thereafter. In 1890 it stood at only 28.6 points over the previous decade and by 1920 it had plummeted to 0.4. Hence, Stowe finds immigration in the last half of the nineteenth century a serious problem for the church, further

³ Walter Herbert Stowe, "Immigration and the Growth of the Episcopal Church," *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 11 (December 1942): 334.

⁴ Peyton Craighill, "The Ministry of the Episcopal Church in the United States of America to Immigrants and Refugees: A Historical Outline," *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 51 (June 1982): 205.

describing the situation in the early years of the twentieth century as reaching alarming proportions.⁵

Close analysis shows the Episcopal Church drew little strength from these new arrivals. Instead, growth chiefly resulted from domestic missionary efforts, especially in the South and West, among people of British descent plus those of foreign extraction who had been thoroughly acculturated over several generations.⁶ The church's focused approach did not, however, preclude contact with immigrants.

During the nineteenth century, the Episcopal Church demonstrated a definite willingness to welcome and incorporate non-English immigrants into the church. The history of the French-speaking parish *L'Eglise du Saint Esprit*, which entered into union with the Diocese of New York in 1804 after 117 years as a Reformed congregation, is well known. Other French congregations were also established but failed to survive more than a few decades. As early as 1835, several clergy from west of the Alleghenies petitioned the General Convention for a German-language Prayer Book to facilitate ministry among local immigrants. The project lingered, however, and was not completed until 1874. In 1872 the House of Bishops received a memorial from several members of the German Evangelical Synod of the West suggesting the consecration of a German bishop and expressing a desire for union with the Episcopal Church. While the House of Bishops gave a sympathetic reply, the request was never acted upon.⁷ Numerous parishes held German-language services and a few, such as Trinity Church, Oshkosh, Wisconsin, established a separate chapel for the immigrant population.⁸ In 1881, St. Mark's in Adams, Massachusetts, began a ministry to the local German population. So successful was the result that by 1891 the congregation numbered more German-speakers than English. Remnants of this ministry are seen in a German women's group, *Der Frauen Verein*, which did not disband until the 1990s.⁹

The significant ministry of today's Episcopal Church to Latinos/Hispanics has a particularly rich heritage. According to Frederick

⁵ Stowe, "Immigration," 342.

⁶ Craighill, "Ministry to Immigrants," 205; Stowe, "Immigration," 352–355, 361.

⁷ William C. Sturgis, ed., *Neighbors: Studies in Immigration from the Standpoint of the Episcopal Church* (New York: Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society, 1919), 186–188.

⁸ Diocese of Fond du Lac archives. Unpublished correspondence.

⁹ *St. Mark's Church (Episcopal) 1881–1981, Search for a New Rector*. Unpublished parish documents.

Bingham Howden, Bishop of the Missionary District of New Mexico and Southwest Texas, St. Anne's Mission, founded in 1922 in El Paso, represented the church's first endeavor among Mexican Americans.¹⁰ Sixty years earlier, however, in May 1866, the Spanish-speaking Church of Santiago had been established in New York City when twelve men, mostly Cuban, organized a Protestant Episcopal church led by the Reverend Angel Herreros de Mora. De Mora left for Lisbon in 1867, where his evangelical efforts led to the establishment of the Lusitanian Church.¹¹ Bishop Horatio Potter authorized a Spanish version of the Prayer Book and in November 1867 the church was received into union with the Diocese of New York as the *Yglesia de Santiago* under the leadership of the Reverend Enrique C. Riley. Riley returned to his native Mexico in January 1869, eventually becoming bishop in 1879.¹² The pastoral and evangelical work of the Spanish Church of Santiago then passed to Joaquin de Palma. Membership eventually reached three hundred. Writing in 1870, de Palma described his work in this way:

I have organized . . . a Sunday-school connected with the Church of Santiago, that numbers about thirty children. . . . I look on them as the future missionaries of the Gospel, and sustainers of our Church in Cuba and South America. I see in this school the nursery of the Protestant faith for the Hispano-American countries. The importance of the missionary work of the Church of Santiago has increased lately with the revolution in Cuba, not only because it promises to open a new and large field for the preaching of the Gospel so near to our shores, but also on account of the great emigration to this country.¹³

¹⁰ Archives of the Episcopal Church, Record RG 55-2-52, as quoted in Craighill, "Ministry to Immigrants," 209.

¹¹ H. E. Noyes, "Church Reform in Spain and Portugal: A Short History of the Reformed Episcopal Churches of Spain and Portugal, from 1868 to the Present Time" (London: Cassell and Co., 1897); http://anglicanhistory.org/europe/noyes_reform1897/07.html.

¹² "Report of the Standing Committee of the Diocese of New York on the Matter of the Relation of the Right Rev. Henry (Enrique) Chauncy Riley, late Bishop of the Church of Jesus in Mexico, to the Diocese of New York. May 2, 1885," transcribed by Wayne Kempton (Diocese of New York, 2010); <http://anglicanhistory.org/mx/report1885.html>.

¹³ Joaquin de Palma, *Church Journal* 18 (1870): Letters to the Editor.

During the 1870s and 1880s de Palma's annual parochial reports show an unflagging evangelical zeal. In 1877 de Palma counted over fifty parishioners doing missionary work in Cuba, Key West, Santo Domingo, Jamaica, Panama, and Venezuela.¹⁴ Following de Palma's death in 1884, Zacarias Vall Spinoza became rector. Spinoza lacked de Palma's evangelistic zeal. The parochial report for 1893 notes the original members of the parish were chiefly Cuban refugees, "many of whom returned ultimately to Cuba, the strength of the parish being thereby considerably weakened."¹⁵ Shortly after Spinoza's resignation in June 1893, the mission closed.

In the first part of the nineteenth century, ministry to immigrants was spotty, slow to develop, generally localized, and insufficient in proportion to the burgeoning masses. By the end of the century, however, organized efforts to meet the spiritual and social needs of immigrants were found in most dioceses. Most were parochial in origin and intended not only to serve the secular but also the spiritual needs of immigrants. By 1919 the Communion Service, if not the entire Prayer Book, had been translated into French, German, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Hebrew, Welsh, Swedish, Czech, Polish, Romanian, Hungarian, Chinese, and Japanese.¹⁶

Efforts to coordinate immigrant ministries on a national scale were limited. The most obvious concerned new arrivals from England, which after the Irish and Germans, respectively, represented the largest source of immigrants during the first great wave (1840–1890). Following a meeting with a visiting delegation from the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, in 1855 the Anglo-American Emigrants' Aid Society was established. The society's practical accomplishments, however, remain unclear. In 1886 the General Convention's Committee on the Spiritual Care of Immigrants reported concerning letters of transfer from British to American churches. The report also announced the establishment of a port chaplaincy in New York that served primarily to identify arriving Anglicans and direct them to Episcopal churches in their new locales.¹⁷

In addition to the nationally sponsored ministries intended to assist arriving Anglicans, three other aspects of the church's wider

¹⁴ *Diocese of New York Annual Parochial Report* (1877): 133.

¹⁵ *Diocese of New York Annual Parochial Report* (1893): 172.

¹⁶ Sturgis, *Neighbors*, 183–214.

¹⁷ Craighill, "Ministry to Immigrants," 206–207.

work with immigrants should be mentioned. The first concerns the Scandinavians. The assimilation of several colonial Swedish churches into union with the Episcopal Church raised awareness among Episcopalians of a shared religious heritage with the Swedes, and thus spurred the church to action. Indeed, the first graduate of Nashotah House was a Swede, the Reverend Gustav Unonius, who in 1849 was asked by a group of Swedes and Norwegians in Chicago to organize a Scandinavian parish within the Episcopal Church. This congregation became the Church of St. Ansgarius, the first of its kind in the Episcopal Church.

Missionary work among Scandinavians remained primarily local, yielding few results until later in the century, when the Reverend J. Gottfried Hammarsköld was appointed missioner to the Swedes. In his account, "From the Land of the Vikings," Hammarsköld notes that the Swedish Mission never made converts of active Christians but ministered to the unchurched masses of Scandinavians, a figure that he estimates at around 2.5 million. Hammarsköld identifies fourteen "Scandinavian Episcopal" churches, more than half located in Minnesota.¹⁸

Episcopalians today are often surprised to find that the Episcopal Church in this period led an organized effort to convert Jews. Various American societies were formed following the founding in 1820 of the American Society for Meliorating the Condition of the Jews. While this first American society represented the efforts of several Protestant denominations, in 1858 a specifically Episcopal organization was founded in New York. A year later General Convention passed a resolution that recognized the duty of the church to convert "the multitudes of the Hebrew race who still reject the Gospel of the Son of God."¹⁹ Support grew rapidly, extending to twenty-seven dioceses and missionary districts by 1883, but then declined just as rapidly. In 1903 the Church Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews issued its last report. Any continuing systematic efforts to convert Jews were turned over to the Board of Missions in 1904. Subsequently General Convention declared that such work fell within the purview of normal parish activity.²⁰

¹⁸ Sturgis, *Neighbors*, 126–128, 235.

¹⁹ *Journal of General Convention* (1859): 174.

²⁰ Craighill, "Ministry to Immigrants," 207–208.

Any ministry to Asians is perhaps noteworthy more for its absence than its presence. In 1919 the Board of Missions commissioned a survey of immigrant work, titled *Neighbors*, to be used as a study document throughout the church during the following year. Remarkably, *Neighbors* makes no mention of domestic mission activity among the Asian population. Episcopal missionaries had arrived in China in 1835 and Japan in 1859, thereby making it logical that some organized effort would have been made to reach out to immigrants arriving from these lands. As will be seen in the case of immigrants coming from central and eastern Europe, the people of Asia were perhaps viewed as having less kinship with America than western Europeans.

The exception was the Diocese of California, which began missionary work among Chinese immigrants in 1854, but without the assistance of the national Board of Missions. It was not until 1871 that General Convention adopted a resolution asking the Board of Missions to investigate how best to bring knowledge of the Christian faith to the large number of newly arrived Chinese. In 1905 the True Sunshine Mission was established in San Francisco; a sister church in Oakland followed a year later. Financial support from the Board of Missions was, however, very limited and tardy.

At the same time, work among the Japanese began with the establishment of St. Peter's Mission in Seattle. A report on West Coast missions among the Japanese, prepared in 1930 by the Reverend F. B. Bartlett, provides a revealing statistic. While there were twenty-seven Methodist missions in the same geographic area devoted to serving Japanese immigrants and twenty-two Presbyterian missions, the Episcopal Church could muster only four.²¹

New Realities

Up until 1880 the vast majority of immigrants had come from northern and western Europe. Although new to America, they were viewed as being "of the same stock," with a shared history, and thus they blended readily into the American scene. Although only a small fraction of the new arrivals had any Anglican connections, the church initially concentrated its missionary efforts among the English, Americans of British descent, and those with whom there had been some special connection, such as the Swedes. With the tide of immigrants

²¹ Craighill, "Ministry to Immigrants," 213.

shifting away from northern and western Europe to southern and eastern Europe and the Orient after 1880, the church was forced to confront new realities. In a chapter in *Neighbors* titled "Immigration and the Church: Early Migration and Immigration," T. J. Lacey observes that the new immigrants "have less historic contact with us; they have less kinship with our religious, social and political ideals; their languages are strange and difficult to our ears." The new wave, he continued, raised profound questions "bound up with the very life and stability of the State."²² Slow to begin domestic missionary work, the Episcopal Church had by the beginning of the twentieth century established a network of missionary boards, commissions, and departments to deal with the burgeoning immigrant population. Whether these newcomers to America were seen as an opportunity or a menace was a matter of much debate in church circles and beyond.

Neighbors illustrates well the dilemma faced not only by Episcopalians but also by all Americans. This study document paints a sensitive picture of the immigrant, advocating a respect for foreign cultures commonly espoused today. In his introductory essay, editor W. C. Sturgis observes, "Nothing could be more fatal than for us to imagine that there exists a perfect type known as 'the American citizen'; that it is superior to all other national types; and that only as the latter are conformed to that imaginary type will they become of value to this nation."²³ The immigrant's native tongue is described as "his most cherished possession." While the newcomer must certainly develop a proficiency in English in order to participate fully in society, no one should be forced to discard one's native tongue. "The most loving care," Sturgis advises, "must be exercised lest in the process of attaining this aim, much of infinite value to him and to us be crushed and irretrievably lost."²⁴ It is the personal responsibility of all church members to exercise understanding, sympathy, and hospitality toward aliens, helping them to find a proper place in the structure of American life. The successful completion of this task will mean that the immigrant has become, "as God Almighty intended him to be, a factor in the upward development of our nation and of human progress."²⁵

²² Sturgis, *Neighbors*, 25, 27.

²³ Sturgis, *Neighbors*, 11.

²⁴ Sturgis, *Neighbors*, 13.

²⁵ Sturgis, *Neighbors*, 14.

Written between the armistice ending World War I and the implementation of the Versailles Treaty, *Neighbors* captures the uncertainty experienced by many Americans. Despite the characterization of the mass of new immigrants as representing a “great opportunity” for the church, the generally sympathetic work reveals a darker side. Time and again immigration is perceived as a problem to be solved. Even more indicative of the church’s ambivalence is the frequent use of the term “menace” to describe those aliens yet to be fully “Americanized,” thereby being brought into the political process through citizenship.²⁶ Writing in the same year as the publication of *Neighbors*, the Bishop of the Diocese of Washington, the Right Reverend Alfred Harding, and the Reverend Thomas Burgess, first secretary of the newly created Bureau of Immigration, produced virtually identical statements that summarized contemporary anxieties. “If, through the neglect of this Church and other Christian bodies, the immigrant is allowed to develop with his spiritual nature untouched, and the result be a revolution which shall sweep away the old ideals, and the republic cease to be, upon whom will the responsibility for the disaster rest?”²⁷

A few examples will illustrate these irrational fears. One must first note that the birth rate among native-born Americans dropped significantly around the turn of the century, just as foreign immigration was peaking. In a report published by the Census Bureau in 1909, General Francis A. Walker, superintendent of the census for 1870 and 1880, speculated that the decline in the birthrate of the native born resulted from the “competitive shock” of immigration. Indeed, Walker said the decline began just as immigration started to increase, and the decline was greatest in those regions, “and in the very counties,” where immigration was greatest.²⁸ Even Bishop Harding notes that immigrants were “ten times as prolific as the native population.”²⁹

Confronted by the threat posed by millions of unacculturated immigrants, government officials enlisted the assistance of churches,

²⁶ Sturgis, *Neighbors*, 32.

²⁷ Alfred Harding, “*E Pluribus Unum: The Christian Americanization of Aliens*,” *The Living Church* (October 4, 1919): 806; Thomas Burgess, “Plan and Budget Proposed, Department of Christian Americanization,” 1919, as quoted in Craighill, “Ministry to Immigrants,” 209.

²⁸ Francis A. Walker, *A Century of Population Growth, 1790–1900* (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of the Census, 1909), 89, as quoted in Stowe, “Immigration,” 334–335.

²⁹ Harding, “Christian Americanization,” 806.

ignoring any lines of separation between church and state. Dr. Sturgis, editor of *Neighbors*, quotes an unnamed assistant attorney general as saying, "Government becomes more nearly perfect as it approaches Christianity."³⁰ Bishop Harding states that Secretary of the Interior Franklin Knight Lane "has been urgently advancing plans for the Americanization of the foreign-born. . . . To this end he is asking the co-operation of the Church, embracing under that term all the religious bodies in the land."³¹ Harding viewed this as more than an invitation or even a challenge; it was a sacred obligation, a God-given mission. After all, it was the Episcopal Church "in which were nurtured two-thirds of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, one-half the framers of the Constitution, and the great majority of the Fathers of our country, from Washington on. The ideals upon which this republic is founded are ideals inculcated by this Church."³²

Particularly in the early decades of the last century, the terms "Americanization" and "Christianization" were often interwoven, combined, and used almost interchangeably. How closely the one followed upon the other can be seen in the fact that in 1916 General Convention authorized the Board of Missions to create a Department of Immigration. Just three years later, in 1919, the Department of Immigration was renamed the Department of Christian Americanization.³³ Sturgis observes, "Neither the Church alone nor the State alone can produce the ideal citizen or, consequently, the ideal Democracy. The action of both, as distinct forces, yet cooperating as one, is necessary."³⁴

A Prayer Answered—For Some

In 1924 the fears of many were relieved, and the prayers of others answered, when Congress acted to make permanent the restrictions on immigration that had been put in place in the period just following World War I. The Immigration Act of 1924, otherwise known as the Johnson-Reed Act, limited the annual number of immigrants who could be admitted from any country to 2 percent of the number of people from that country who were already living in the United States

³⁰ Sturgis, *Neighbors*, 8.

³¹ Harding, "Christian Americanization," 806.

³² Harding, "Christian Americanization," 806.

³³ Craighill, "Ministry to Immigrants," 209.

³⁴ Sturgis, *Neighbors*, 9.

in 1890. Because significantly fewer southern and eastern Europeans were recorded in the 1890 census than in 1920, this effectively reduced immigration from these regions while making more room than necessary for such countries as Great Britain. When the quota system was finalized, the ratio of immigrants able to be admitted from northern and western Europe compared to southern and eastern Europe was roughly five to one. Restrictions for Asians were even more severe.

The new legislation strongly affected the church's immigrant ministry. With any new influx now limited, the church abandoned most of its nationally coordinated ethnic ministries in favor of work carried out at the parish level. "The Report of the Joint Commission to Study Alien Races," presented to General Convention in 1925, noted that the task of Americanization had now been undertaken by every possible public agency; thus the work of the church had shifted away from the Americanization of alien races to the Christianization of Americans of alien parentage. The report goes on to say that the best work of the church is carried out in the quiet routine of parish work, the regular services of the church held for all Americans of every racial origin, home visitations without regard to race, and the bringing together of all children in the church schools. In summarizing the church's liturgical and educational resources, the report makes the significant observation that "the language is English."³⁵ No longer faced with ministering to large numbers of immigrants, the church abandoned its efforts to understand the ways of foreigners. Although several dozen ethnic Episcopal congregations existed well into the 1920s, their usefulness rapidly declined as the children and grandchildren of immigrants were naturally assimilated into American society.³⁶

Let us turn now to a closer examination of two articles by Walter H. Stowe, "Immigration and the Growth of the Episcopal Church," published in 1942, and "An Encouraging Decade for the Episcopal Church: 1930–1940," published two years later. Stowe's governing questions are twofold: Did immigration hinder the growth of the Episcopal Church, and did its restriction have a positive effect for the church? He answers a resounding "yes" to both questions.

³⁵ *Journal of General Convention* (1925): 622–623.

³⁶ *Journal of General Convention* (1925): 619–25; Sturgis, *Neighbors*, 235–237; Craighill, "Ministry to Immigrants," 207, 211.

Nevertheless, what the Episcopal Church gained in numbers, it lost in diversity and depth.

Stowe's argument is precise and focused, concerning only the ratio of Episcopalians to the overall population. In 1830 the membership of the Episcopal Church numbered 30,939, or one out of every 415 Americans. In 1930 membership in the Episcopal Church stood at 1,261,167, or 1 out of every 97 Americans.³⁷ Despite these impressive gains, Stowe convincingly argues that by 1900 the rate of church growth was just barely outpacing the rate of population growth. By 1920, the growth rate in the Episcopal Church had declined even further. During the previous decade the ratio of Episcopalians to the whole population had increased by only 0.4 ratio points. Between 1930 and 1940, however, after the passage of the Johnson-Reed Act, the trend was reversed and the ratio of Episcopalians to the general population began to show marked improvement. In 1940 the ratio stood at 1 to 90.2, an improvement of 7.1 ratio points in just twenty years.³⁸

Stowe observes, "World War I shook this country out of its complacency, routed the sentimentalists and their 'melting pot' theory, and led straight to the Johnson Act of 1924."³⁹ He goes on to say, "Few of us realized the significance of this act for the growth of the Episcopal Church, just as few of us grasped the paralyzing effect of unrestricted immigration on the rate of the Church's growth since 1890 and the dark future for this Church if such immigration had continued much longer."⁴⁰

Until a better statistical analysis is undertaken, it is hard to dispute Stowe's findings. What is disturbing, at least for many contemporary readers, is the subtle anti-immigrant bias and the inherent pro-WASP attitudes woven into the fabric of the articles. A few quotations will suffice; the following remarks are listed among the general conclusions of "An Encouraging Decade":

Moreover, three handicaps, two of which were well-nigh insuperable, which for the first 30 years of the 20th century made it difficult for the Episcopal Church to grow much faster than the

³⁷ Stowe, "Immigration," 344-345.

³⁸ Stowe, "Immigration," 348.

³⁹ Stowe, "Immigration," 335.

⁴⁰ Stowe, "Immigration," 360.

population, are being so lifted or lessened as to work to the advantage of this Church's growth.

One of these is immigration which, between 1900 and 1930, was in danger of swamping not only the Episcopal Church (and some others) but the nation. . . . Unless the temper of the American people on this subject should change, it will never again be a serious factor in population growth.⁴¹

In "Immigration and the Growth of the Episcopal Church," Stowe writes: "The growth which the Episcopal Church has achieved between 1830 and 1930 has been in spite of immigration and not because of it."⁴² He further declares, "The Episcopal Church makes its strongest appeal to the native born among the unchurched population. When immigration is little or no factor in the growth of population, the Church's ratio of population to one communicant improves decisively."⁴³

In fairness to Stowe, at no time does he exhibit any clear racial prejudice. In a footnote he says, "The total exclusion of all Orientals was both unnecessary and unfortunate, and not in accordance with standards of Christian justice."⁴⁴ Stowe's thinking simply reflects the nativism of the wider church and a good share of the general population during the middle half of the twentieth century. Patriotic feelings occasioned by the war effort further encouraged reverence for the church's English heritage and historic American past. Indeed, many Episcopalians in this period came to view the Episcopal Church as *the* church of the nation. That his conclusions were by and large representative of the church's thinking in this period was attested to by the reprinting in book form of "Immigration and the Growth of the Episcopal Church," which was originally published as an article in the *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church*. The book was prepared under the auspices of the Sub-committee on Statistical Growth and included a foreword by Bishop Frank W. Creighton, chair of the Joint Commission on Strategy and Policy. In the foreword Creighton writes, "Even the uninitiated must know that factors other than mere percentage increase in communicants account

⁴¹ Walter Herbert Stowe, "An Encouraging Decade for the Episcopal Church: 1930-1940," *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 13 (1944): 291.

⁴² Stowe, "Immigration," 349.

⁴³ Stowe, "Immigration," 360.

⁴⁴ Stowe, "Immigration," 360, note *.

for the Church's growth. An all-important factor is the restriction of immigration."⁴⁵ Such views persisted long after the repudiation of restrictive immigration quotas based on ethnicity. Indeed, the church today still struggles to liberate itself from the cultural and intellectual legacy of those years fraught with nationalism, imperialism, racism, and classism.⁴⁶

In the years immediately following the end of World War II, the United States welcomed an influx of refugees, largely from Eastern Europe. The numbers were in no way comparable to the previous flood of immigrants and were readily accommodated. Ministry to these refugees was truly an ecumenical effort administered by boards of the World Council of Churches, the National Council of Churches, and the refugee and resettlement program of the Episcopal Church. The Episcopal Church was directly responsible for the resettlement of some four thousand newcomers to America by 1956.⁴⁷ This resettlement work was an act of mercy and compassion in accord with gospel principles, and there is little evidence that evangelization played a major role in the process.

Several forces combined in the later 1960s which led the church not only to a renewed commitment to immigrant ministries, but to a questioning of the church's very identity and role in society. In 1965 the lifting of restrictive quotas based on ethnicity opened the door to millions of new immigrants. The counter-cultural movement of the 1960s openly questioned the values, norms, traditions, and leadership of venerable institutions such as the Episcopal Church, challenging them to prove their relevance. The civil rights movement ostensibly concerned the rights of Black Americans, but the social justice issues which underlay the movement were soon extended to other minorities. Finally, the Vietnam War brought America back to the world stage from its postwar isolationism and soon brought new waves of refugees from Southeast Asia.

The New Immigrants

The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, also known as the Hart-Celler Act, abolished the system of national origin quotas

⁴⁵ Frank W. Creighton, Foreword, in Herbert Walter Stowe, *Immigration and the Growth of the Episcopal Church* (Richmond, Va.: Richmond Press, 1942), n.p.

⁴⁶ "Report of the Standing Commission on Mission and Evangelism," 500.

⁴⁷ Craighill, "Ministry to Immigrants," 214.

in place since 1924. By equalizing immigration policies regardless of country of origin, the act resulted in new immigration from non-European nations, dramatically changing the ethnic make-up of the United States.⁴⁸ While Europeans accounted for nearly 60 percent of the total foreign-born population in 1970, by the year 2000 they accounted for only 15 percent. Between 1965 and 1970 immigration doubled, and doubled again between 1970 and 1990.⁴⁹ Two decades later, immigration from Asia has surpassed that of North America, the Caribbean, and South America combined. The leading countries of origin, in order, are Mexico, India, the Philippines, China, and Vietnam.

The post-World War II years witnessed the rebirth of an intentional ministry to immigrants. A handful of Spanish-speaking congregations were planted in several southwestern states, and the Dioceses of Long Island and New York began work among Puerto Ricans. The Diocese of California continued its long-established work among the Chinese of San Francisco and Oakland. Most ethnic ministries, however, were the result of local parish or diocesan initiatives.⁵⁰ It was not until the 1970s that the Episcopal Church made a serious attempt to revive ministry to immigrants.

The General Convention of 1970 began the process of establishing a nationally coordinated ministry among the Latino/Hispanic community in the United States, while ministry to Asian Americans was considered three years later. The appointment of national staff officers, as well as supporting commissions and task forces accountable to General Convention, soon followed. After a half-century of biased indifference, the Episcopal Church exhibited a renewed commitment to welcome the sojourner dwelling in her midst.

Results during the ensuing forty years have been at times both gratifying and disappointing. The uneven performance is attributable to factors such as a shortage of clergy and lay leaders trained for work with immigrant and ethnic minorities, liturgical and educational resources available only in English, and inadequate funding, but also in

⁴⁸ Peter S. Canellos, "Obama Victory Took Root in Kennedy-inspired Immigration Act," *The Boston Globe* (November 11, 2008); http://www.boston.com/news/nation/articles/2008/11/11/obama_victory_took_root_in_kennedy_inspired_immigration_act/.

⁴⁹ David Frum, *How We Got Here: The 70's* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 268–269.

⁵⁰ Craighill, "Ministry to Immigrants," 216.

no small part to a lack of commitment and interest at the local church level.

In 1973 the Commission on Hispanic Ministries submitted a report to General Convention that showed a cultural sensitivity quite at variance with the jingoistic swagger of the previous five decades.⁵¹ Despite a heightened consciousness, some forty years later a significant number of Episcopal parishes continue to shun any intentional outreach to ethnic minorities. As part of a two-year study undertaken by the Office of Latino/Hispanic Ministries, published in 2009, one hundred churches in high Latino/Hispanic density areas were contacted. Thirty of the one hundred refused to be interviewed. While an argument from silence is always problematical, the authors of the report comment, "Their reluctance to participate in the survey, in addition to their lack of existing programs, seems to indicate that they do not perceive the Latino/Hispanic population in their area as a potential congregant segment."⁵² Of the seventy responding congregations, which varied in size from forty Latino/Hispanic congregants to over eight hundred, commonly identified obstacles included growth impeded by small groups of unwelcoming families, exclusion based on nationality, and congregational conflicts rooted in classism and immigration status.⁵³

The strategic vision for reaching Latinos/Hispanics outlined in the 2009 report differs significantly from previous attempts in that it envisions a long-term, multigenerational approach. In the past, even when a respect for the newcomer's heritage and language was exhibited, the expressed goal was to incorporate aliens into the mainstream of American life. As we have seen, in the period following World War I, this process was bluntly referred to as "Christian Americanization." Ethnic ministries were intended to serve immigrants and their children, while by the third and fourth generation, being fully acculturated, Americans of immigrant stock were deemed able to find their way into the Episcopal Church.⁵⁴ The report argues that in the case of Latinos/Hispanics, strong identification with the values, culture, and

⁵¹ *Journal of General Convention* (1973): 567–571.

⁵² "The Episcopal Church's Strategic Vision for Reaching Latinos/Hispanics," (July 2009), 4; http://archive.episcopalchurch.org/documents/Strategic_Vision_7-09.pdf.

⁵³ "Strategic Vision," 5.

⁵⁴ Stowe, "Decade," 390.

traditions of their ancestors continues long after members have been fully Americanized.

The report notes the common tendency to overlook the multilevel nature of the Latino/Hispanic community. Not only are people drawn from differing socio-economic, demographic, cultural, and political contexts, the Latino/Hispanic community covers a wide spectrum of acculturation, ranging from newly arrived undocumented aliens to those whose families have inhabited the U.S. Southwest even prior to it becoming United States territory. Indeed, approximately 60 percent of Hispanics in the United States were born here, with only 40 percent being foreign-born. Within the Latino/Hispanic population, five different target groups or congregant archetypes are identified in the report, each requiring a different strategic approach. Significantly, the report stresses the role of women as community leaders and gatekeepers in the evangelization and incorporation process. Using standard marketing techniques, the 2009 report advocates a proactive approach. It lists a set of measurable objectives, inviting the whole church to adopt six strategies designed to make the church more user-friendly to Latinos/Hispanics.

The 2009 report identified 298 Latino/Hispanic congregations in the United States and set as a goal an increase of 15 percent by 2012.⁵⁵ A response to an inquiry made to the Office of Latino/Hispanic Ministries in May 2012 estimates there are approximately 360 Latino congregations in the U.S. and about another 350 in Province IX, comprised of seven dioceses in Latin America and the Caribbean.⁵⁶ The growing need for well-educated clergy and lay leaders is addressed by two programs at the Seminary of the Southwest in Austin. The seminary offers students a Hispanic Church Studies concentration, and is developing a new program slated to begin in October 2013. Designed to satisfy theological education requirements for ordination, Episcopal Theological Education for Emerging Ministries (ETEEM) is a joint certificate program conducted in Spanish by the Seminary of the Southwest and the Lutheran Seminary Program in the Southwest. The innovative certificate program brings students together four times per year for three years in intensive three-day sessions.

⁵⁵ "Strategic Vision," 20.

⁵⁶ E-mail from Anthony Guillén, Office of Latino/Hispanic Ministries, dated June 5, 2012.

While Latino/Hispanic ministry presents multiple difficulties because of its complex nature, ministry to the Asian community is perhaps even more challenging. Lacking common linguistic roots and a geographic focal point such as the Iberian Peninsula, Asians, who constitute two-thirds of the earth's population today, are perhaps at best united by a philosophical approach to life that seeks to balance wisdom and pragmatism. The Episcopal Church's Asiamerica Ministry program of evangelism and service is designed to bring people of Asian and Pacific Island background into the church. At present the work of Episcopal Asiamerica Ministry (EAM) is grouped into six ethnic convocations: Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Southeast Asian (Vietnamese, Cambodians, Laotians, Hmong, Burmese), and South Asian (Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Sri Lankans). Although the Episcopal Church has historically shunned proselytizing active members of other churches, the Asian American community provides fertile ground for evangelization. Christian missionaries have labored in Asia for several centuries, and India boasts one of the oldest Christian communities, the Mar Toma Church. Nevertheless, apart from Korea and the Philippines, Christians represent a small minority in Asia's forty-nine independent countries. Among the 20 million or so Asian American immigrants living in the United States today, about 80 percent are non-Christian.⁵⁷

Challenges faced by Episcopal Asiamerican Ministries (EAM) are multifold. In addition to the ethnic, linguistic, and cultural differences which separate the vast Asian immigrant community, socio-economic divisions are most evident. According to U.S. Census data, Asian immigrants are numbered among both the richest and poorest in America. Many are well-educated and form part of the new high-tech elite, while Southeast Asian refugees—some of whom have been here for a generation or more—represent some of the poorest. Many Asians are victims of human trafficking, illegal recruitment, sweatshop slave labor, and other forms of workplace discrimination.

Attention to social justice issues forms a significant part of the church's ministry to Asian Americans. Of the church's 107 ethnic Asian American congregations, many are served by immigrant clergy

⁵⁷ Winfred B. Vergara, "Asiamerica Ministry in the 21st Century," address delivered at the Everyone Everywhere Conference, Estes Park, Colorado, October 15, 2011; http://www.episcopalchurch.org/sites/default/files/downloads/asiamerica_final_pamphlet.pdf.

who lack the necessary skills and training to act as advocates for human rights in the American context.⁵⁸ These clergy frequently live and work on the margins of diocesan life and need to be drawn more into the mainstream of church life. On the other hand, Asian American clergy who have grown up in North America, or were educated here, often find it difficult to bridge the gap when appointed to serve among recently arrived immigrants. New educational opportunities and resources for both clergy and lay leaders are urgently needed. A recent welcome addition is the Doctor of Ministry program at the Episcopal Divinity School, which, in cooperation with EAM, offers a concentration in Asian American Ministry Studies. A particularly valuable asset enjoyed by EAM is the church's strong ecumenical partnerships with such local indigenous churches as the Philippine Independent Church, the Mar Toma Church, and the Churches of North and South India.

The period following World War II and the Vietnam War witnessed the arrival of many persons displaced by those conflicts. Today the United States continues to welcome refugees from around the globe routed from their homes by war, political unrest, and natural disaster. For these individuals, moving to the States may not represent the fulfillment of a long-held dream but instead may be a matter of simple survival. Compassion and mercy are paramount qualities exercised in the church's care for refugees. While some refugees come well prepared for a new life in the United States, many are not, lacking financial resources, language skills, and marketable skills, as well as possibly needing professional counseling services to deal with past trauma. Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM), established in 1988, works closely with local parish churches, agencies, schools, and health care providers to ease the transition both for refugees and the communities which welcome them.⁵⁹

In 2011 the U.S. resettlement program accepted 56,424 forcibly uprooted individuals. Of these, EMM and its network partners, working through 33 local offices, across 23 states and 28 dioceses, welcomed 3644 new Americans from 33 countries around the globe.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ E-mail from Winfred B. Vergara, EAM Office, dated June 6, 2012.

⁵⁹ Episcopal Migration Ministries, "We Are Here," 2011 Annual Report, 5, 12. For a concise history of the Episcopal Church's earlier ministry to refugees, see the Explanation appended to General Convention Resolution 2012-B028, <http://www.generalconvention.org/resolutions/download/423-1343912774>.

⁶⁰ Episcopal Migration Ministries, "We Are Here," 8.

The vast majority, 2998, came from southern and eastern Asia and the Middle East, with Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Europe, and Central Asia following in that order.⁶¹

Especially noteworthy is EMM's work to resettle thousands of Sudanese refugees, including several hundred "Lost Boys." Today there are Sudanese communities in forty dioceses across the United States, with four dioceses having congregations specifically identified as Sudanese: Colorado, Arizona, Western Michigan, and Western Missouri.⁶² The number of Sudanese refugees has slowed in recent years, with most African refugees now comprised of Somalis, Eritreans, and Congolese.⁶³

The "New Visions Initiative for Transforming Congregations of African Descent," authored by the Office of Black Ministries and endorsed by General Convention (Resolution 2012-D093), seeks to strengthen the rich African heritage found in the Episcopal Church. The "New Visions Initiative" and its partner document, "Priorities for the Episcopal Church in the 21st Century for Episcopalians of African Descent (African American, Caribbean, African National)," acknowledge a decline in membership among historically black churches in the United States and the growing number of black immigrants representing African nationals and residents of the Caribbean. Also acknowledged is the difficulty of incorporating these new immigrants into existing African American churches. The resolution charges the Office of Black Ministries with responsibility for initiating actions leading to the transformation and redevelopment of approximately 20 percent of African American churches. The goal is for these revitalized congregations to become inviting communities of faith to all people of African descent.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Episcopal Migration Ministries, "We Are Here," 18–19.

⁶² Angela Ifill and the Office of Black Ministries, "Priorities for the Episcopal Church in the 21st Century for Episcopalians of African Descent (African American, Caribbean, African National)," n.d., 9; http://www.episcopalchurch.org/sites/default/files/downloads/black_ministries_strategic_plan.pdf.

⁶³ Lucy Chumbley, "World Refugee Day a Chance to Highlight Church's Resettlement Work," Episcopal News Service, June 20, 2012; <http://episcopaldigitalnet.com/ens/2012/06/20/world-refugee-day-a-chance-to-highlight-churchs-resettle-ment-work/>.

⁶⁴ General Convention Resolution 2012-D093, <http://www.generalconvention.org/resolutions/download/430-1343927418>.

Conclusion

The Reverend Winfred B. Vergara, EAM Missioner, has stated that he agrees with the Latino theologian Virgilio Elizondo when he says that the American church of the twenty-first century will not be black and white but “mestizo.” Vergara adds that it will be “a church that is like a diamond with many facets, faces and voices.”⁶⁵ That such diversity can even be imagined for the tradition-bound Episcopal Church says much about the changes which have occurred in the last seventy-five years. To a great extent these changes were brought about through the process of welcoming and incorporating new immigrants into the community of faith.

Unlike the nineteenth century, when the church took decades to organize a coordinated response to a changing America, by the early 1970s the Episcopal Church had in place a basic national structure to address the ministry needs of immigrants. The succeeding forty years has witnessed both success and failure. A recent story on National Public Radio focusing on the Episcopal Church’s ministry to Latinos/Hispanics in Oregon summarizes for many the present situation. On the positive side, the report noted that twenty years ago there were only one hundred fifty Latino Episcopalians in Oregon, while today the number is over eight hundred. The same report spoke of a typical coffee hour at Sts. Peter and Paul Church in Portland held between the English-language morning service and the afternoon Spanish-language service. The conversation is all in English because no one from the Spanish service comes early to socialize. One parishioner observed, “We had a barbeque here on the lawn a month or so ago. Both congregations came, but the Latinos mostly sat with the Latinos, and the English sat with the Anglos.”⁶⁶

The fears underlying the contemporary debates on immigration policy often mirror those of a century ago. Although generally sympathetic to the plight of immigrants, church leaders at the time responded to the menace of unbridled immigration by joining in the Americanization process. This is a far cry from today, when the church actively lobbies for comprehensive immigration reform which will provide aliens with a clear and timely path to family reunification

⁶⁵ Vergara, “AsiAmerica Ministry,” no pagination.

⁶⁶ Chris Lehman, “Episcopal Church Woos Latinos to Congregations,” Northwest Public Radio, September 11, 2012; <http://nwpr.org/post/episcopal-church-woos-latinos-congregations>.

and legal employment. The underlying justification is no longer political or even social, but theological: “We as a nation deserve an immigration system that reflects our values and our history. Our nation and our faith find foundation in the belief that all people are created in the likeness of God and should therefore be treated with dignity, equality, and fairness under our laws.”⁶⁷

In ministering to the sojourner in our midst, the Episcopal Church today is reclaiming a rich, but largely forgotten, piece of her history from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The diversity which is visibly noticeable in many of the church’s national and diocesan gatherings, and sometimes less so on the parish level, reflects the growing diversity of the twenty-first-century United States. In seeking to proclaim the gospel to the whole of society, rather than limit its vision to particular races, classes, or cultures, the Episcopal Church is staying true to its Anglican heritage of being a church for all people, though it still has a way to go in meeting that goal.

⁶⁷ Written testimony submitted to the Senate Judiciary Committee by the Episcopal Church Office of Government Relations, quoted in Episcopal News Service, “Church Testifies on Immigration Reform in US Senate Committee,” February 13, 2013; <http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/ens/2013/02/13/church-testifies-on-immigration-reform-in-us-senate-committee/>.

