Dorwatha Woods Adderley  
Kate Boran and Lindsay Sand

We had the opportunity to meet with the principal at Ascension School, Dorwatha Woods Adderley to discuss issues concerning the Hispanic families and children associated with Ascension. Currently there are approximately 20 Hispanic students, out of a total of approximately 275 students at the school.

According to Ms. Woods Adderley, one of the goals of the school regarding, the Hispanic community and students is to get as many of the Hispanic students as they can from the parish into the school. Also, it is the goal of the school to bring these students forward academically as well as celebrate their culture, while improving their English. One important aspect of this project is to try to break down the communication barriers between the Hispanic population and the administration of the parish and other groups in the community. Recording this, we questioned what she believed were the most pressing, needs of the Hispanic community presently. Ms. Woods Adderley assured us that the school had already taken action concerning these immediate needs. The school has hired a family coordinator that works full time at the school who communicates with the Hispanic families that do not speak English. He is available so that the families are comfortable seeking assistance from the school as well as expressing, their concerns. Also, any literature, as far as handouts, is written in both Spanish and English so the children and families are both aware of school activities. These actions have helped make the families feel more welcome and comfortable at the school.

The Ascension School has an interesting approach to encourage Spanish-speaking families to enroll their children at the school. Ms. Woods Adderley actively seeks students from the parish itself to recruit as many students as she can. Also, the school seeks students from the community who may not attend the parish. A group of people from the school went into local apartment buildings to give families information about the school itself so that they are aware of the opportunities it offers. We thought that one way to encourage students was to possibly offer English classes for the parents. In suggesting this, we found that the school currently does not offer specific classes for the parents, but rather they are encouraged to attend tutoring sessions with the kids so that both student and parent are improving their English skills.

Being that the Ascension School is located in an area that relies heavily on financial support, we inquired what types of support are available to low-income families that may wish to attend Ascension. We discovered that most Hispanic families do not pay tuition because the students are sponsored by others in the community who want their children to have a Catholic education. The school does not seek students from any particular social class but rather they want all children to attend. One encouraging fact was that regardless of social class, the students at Ascension School are known for high test scores and academic success. Ms. Woods Adderley attributes this to high expectations, hard work and a solid curriculum.
Along with this, the school promotes unity and acceptance among the students by placing students with similar needs and backgrounds in the same classes. This allows the students to be comfortable in their environment, which helps them learn. Although the students appear to learn better when they are surrounded by those with similar needs and backgrounds, the school also encourages Hispanic and non-Hispanic families to build community. Each family is asked to do a certain amount of volunteering at the school so that they are involved in the lives of all the children as well as other families. The families also participate in different cultural exchange nights, where the different cultures at Ascension school are explained, and celebrated through dances, literature, and interaction between families.

We ended our conversation by asking what things the school would like to know from the Hispanic community at Ascension. Ms. Woods Adderley hesitated at the question but hoped to continue to learn more about the Spanish language and culture. She has truly opened herself to the students and families and has been able to see the value that they bring to the school. She really enjoys working with Hispanic families because they are peaceful and respectful. She believes that the children have had good home training and appreciates their eagerness to learn.

We have learned a lot from our interview with Dorwatha Woods Adderley, especially her love and commitment to the students and families that attend Ascension. It appears that the school is making several attempts to encourage Hispanic families and students to be involved with the school and build unity with the surrounding community. Each child and family is equally important to the school and continuing efforts will encourage more families and children to participate in a growing and healthy school environment.

The Ascension Project has taught us as much as it could, without the completion of interviews, about the struggles of a parish community in a more challenging area, financially and physically. They do a great deal to ensure that the future for the kids at the school and parish is easier, and also try to build some sort of community for anyone in need. All the people that our class interviewed stressed that community building and support were their main objectives, so that Ascension can have a more unified, yet diverse, parish. By interviewing these different people, we were able to understand the goals of a challenged parish, which are oftentimes different than our home parishes in Minnesota or wherever we might live. As different challenges face these people, you can still identify the common thread: faith. Whether they be dealing with immigration papers or Sunday school issues, the community at Ascension mirrors many communities with their dedication to the next generation, and a desire to be part of something bigger.

**Interview with Mr. Michael DePass,**  
Teacher and Translator at Ascension School

Interview by:  
Blake Arnold  
Kevin Hadsall

We interviewed Michael DePass, a teacher and translator at Ascension School. Michael's comments and insight were very interesting and provided an in depth look at how Hispanic families function in a school community such as that seen at Ascension. Mr. DePass told us that there is a fairly small Hispanic student
population at the current time, consisting of 21 students from 15 families. Seven of
the fifteen families are related, usually through cousins. As of now, 31 children
from 20 families are registered for next semester at Ascension, but this number will
still only compromise 10% of the school population. This past year has been the
first year of major Hispanic student
involvement with interaction between the school, church, and community. Many of
the families of students at Ascension come from outside of the United States with
the students being born in the US. The school is trying to facilitate communication
between the families of Hispanic students and the greater school community. Mr.
DePass explained that some of the ways they encourage communication is through
conferences, community activities and frequent mailings to parents. Mr. DePass' tranlation skills are used both at conferences and in many mailings sent home to
parents. By having all documents available in Spanish and English, the parents of
Hispanic children who are not bilingual are able to understand what is going-on at
school. Mr. DePass says that while the documents being sent home are an accurate
means of facilitating communication, he prefer[s] talking to the parents. You might
think that you put things down perfectly but sometimes it doesn't get the point
across completely."

Regarding the Hispanic students, "they all seem to be a positive influence in
all of their classes," says Mr. DePass. He said that most of the Hispanic students
look out for each other, even if they are not related. The children are "very
respectful." Mr. DePass, who lived in Guatemala for several years, says that this
respect is really part of the Hispanic culture, "there's a respect for the teacher, the
educational system." Discipline issues have not been a problem, Mr. DePass said.
"All you have to say is no compartando -bien (not cooperating well)" and the
problem is pretty much corrected. The parents of Hispanic students are very
receptive and very willing to help, but problems are few and far between.

Students of similar backgrounds in public schools have had low test scores
and trouble with the development of their English language skills. Students at
Ascension, however, place high on their standardized tests and maintain high levels
of English comprehension. Mr. DePass attributes this to the teaching styles used at
Ascension. Classes are all taught in English, not bilingually like at some public
schools, so that students are completely immersed in the English language. On top
of this class time, tutors are available for Spanish speaking students after school to
help with any hard concepts or other difficulties in class. -Overall, Mr. DePass says
that it is the students that truly make the difference. They are willing to learn and
respect the education that they are receiving. "They're shining stars" in the school.

**Rico Sotelo**
Mateo Henry
Rocio Montalvo
Erika Maruska

For the Ascension Parish Project, our group had to interview two of the
leaders of the Catholic Hispanic population in the Twin Cities. The first was Rico
Sotelo, who is a volunteer for both the Ascension Parish and the Archdiocese of St.
Paul/Minneapolis. Rico Sotelo is a native of Mexico who came to the United States
over ten years ago. He spends most of his time working with the Hispanic youth of
Ascension Parish. He mentioned that he and a group of youth leaders moved to
Ascension Parish from Santa Rosario Parish about three years ago to serve the
growing Hispanic population. He is very involved in working with and training leaders for the various youth groups in the Archdiocese. He says that one of the main things that needs to be done to better serve the Hispanics of Ascension and the entire Archdiocese is to have a well-trained leadership. With better, more experienced leaders, the Catholic Church will be better prepared to meet the needs of the youth and the rest of the Hispanic presence in the Archdiocese. He mentioned an event for Hispanic youth from all over the Archdiocese called the Día Juvenil. These "Youth Days" are offered once a month, and it is a chance to connect the different parishes that have a Hispanic presence. He also mentioned a program in San Antonio at the Mexican-American Cultural Center that trains Hispanic youth leaders. Rico expressed the desire to go on mission trips with the youth group to other states, and he is planning to take a group of leaders to Kansas for a mission trip in hopes that they will gain the experience necessary to take a group of their own in the future.

Anne Attea

The other leader in the Hispanic community is Anne Attea who is the director of Hispanic ministry for the Archdiocese. Both are very active in the Ascension Parish community and with the Hispanic community as a whole. She was able to give us a view of the situation of Hispanic Catholics in the whole Archdiocese. She said there are thirty-four Spanish-speaking priests in the Archdiocese. Many of these priests are younger because of the recent growth in the Hispanic population of the Archdiocese. She said that there is a need to build a sense of community among those from Latin America, because many people do not realize that these Latinos are from many different countries in Latin America. It would be like forcing a group of "Europeans" together without recognizing the many different cultures that make up Europe. One main goal is to have further religious education for the youth of the Archdiocese. Anne, as well as Rico, said that the youth are the driving force and hope of the Hispanic community. In comparison to other parishes with a Hispanic presence, Ascension is more advanced in having a clergy that speaks the language of these people. One problem among the community is the high dropout rate among high school students, which is close to fifty percent. The youth do not see the point in finishing high school because they would be working at McDonald's with or without a diploma. Anne noted that the community as a whole is very poor, and that Ascension does not have too much in the way of financial help for these poor people. She also stressed the importance of developing leadership for the youth of the Archdiocese along with Rico.

As a whole, our group had a positive learning experience with the Ascension Parish Project. It was interesting to learn the needs and hopes of a different culture. As always, we noted that there are many similarities between our culture and the culture of the Hispanics at Ascension Parish. Rocio was able to note the similarities and differences between the Hispanic community in her state of California and those in Minnesota. She saw similarities in the importance of the community, and the importance of the Catholic Church in the community. The Church is something that unites these peoples, and unity is one of the main things that the Hispanic community is looking for. The Hispanic community is very intent on the education and development of the youth in the Parish. They see the youth as the future of the community. The Ascension Parish Project created a better understanding of the problems facing this particular immigrant community in the Twin Cities. One of the main things this community needs is leadership at all levels:
in their churches, in the schools, and in their businesses. It also created an awareness of the problems facing the younger generation of Hispanics in the Cities. We did experience some frustration with not being able to get more in touch with more of the parishioners at Ascension. It is hard to see how beneficial the work we did will be without that experience with the actual community. As a whole, it was a good learning experience for us who were involved in the project. We hope our work will be of some benefit to the people of the Ascension Parish.

**Estela Mananchero**  
Aaron Mastrian  
Rachel Reinhardt

As part of the project working with the Ascension Parish in Minneapolis, we met with Estela Mananchero, who works with Ascension and many other churches in the area as part of the Hispanic Ministry team. She coordinates many of her activities with the Hispanic leaders across the community, and through these various churches. The purpose of the interview with Estela was to gauge how the Ascension program was working with Hispanic community to create integration between the immigrated Hispanics and the native Anglos. We talked about the challenges and successes that the program had faced so far.

Estela came to this country for the first time 22 years ago, following her husband's pursuit for better work. They traveled to many different countries, including Egypt, China, and of course the United States, before she finally settled in here in the Twin Cities nine years ago. When she first came to this country, she couldn't speak, read, or even understand any English, and was quick to decide that she wanted to go home to what was comfortable to her. Her husband then enrolled her in a school to learn English so that she would be able to adapt. At that time, the amount of people who were in the similar situation was extremely small, and finding a communal group to help her adapt was not possible.

Estela said that the struggles that she went through in trying to adapt to a whole new language and culture is part of what helps her the most in her job, because she can easily relate to what the people are going through when they first arrive here. She also can help facilitate communication between those who just arrived here and everyone else, since she is now completely bilingual.

Her main focus here at the Ascension project is working to integrate the community, mainly within the church, but steps towards awareness outside it as well. She is part of a mission team that works with many different churches that trains the workers to help others within the community, not only the Hispanics, but also the Anglo population as well. The challenge is trying to balance the sense of the older traditions in the cultures that these people come from, and yet allow for integration to a new community.

The first problem that these Hispanics often face is the extremely difficult language barrier. While there are more people who are bilingual in the twin cities now more than ever before, there are still not enough. On the other side, it is difficult for the Anglos to see their community change so much, so quickly. Often there is resistance to the new members of the community, and they often feel that their own sense of tradition could be fading as well. Also, oftentimes they are not
aware of the efforts that programs like Ascension are making to integrate the community, and there is very little interaction between the two groups. One of the future goals of Ascension would be to have a completely bilingual service, however this would be difficult since the Anglo and Hispanic ideas of worship are so different (for the Anglos it is very orderly, while the Hispanics often allow for the children to run free during the service, obvious clashes of preferences such as these are still far too common).

The main hardship for these people is that they still do not feel completely welcome in the community as- a whole, and this sense of tension inhibits integration. It is especially difficult for those who face the language barrier, and have to struggle with communication without much help. Estela herself said that she still does not feel 100% welcome here as she would in her home country. However, because she knows how difficult the transition can be, she does everything in her power to reduce the hardships on these people.

She views the situation as slowly improving, but with many obstacles still facing the church such as the obvious language barriers, problems of ignorance, and the difficulties of mixing old and new traditions. Awareness is always key for programs such as this, and reaching out to our university for this project is an example of the long process that is necessary for further integration. Integration is a two-sided goal, and both sides must work on moving towards the middle, so that the community as a whole can move forward.

We think that the efforts that are being made by Estela and the Hispanic ministry team will be an integral part of future integration of the community. We also think that someone should focus on assisting the integration aspect from the Anglo side, since both groups need to work together, it can't be just a one-sided effort. Simple events such as communal gatherings would go a long way towards awareness of this effort that is being made by the Ascension parish.

Patti Stromen
By: L. Yeager, L. Eggers

Patti Stromen is Parish Administrator at Ascension Catholic Church in North Minneapolis. One of her challenges is to help integrate Ascension’s large and ever-growing Spanish-speaking community with an English-speaking population that is in itself very diverse ethnically. In an effort to help identify ways to facilitate this process, we interviewed Patti, at her office at Ascension. A summation of the salient points of our conversation follows.

An important goal at Ascension is to grow a multicultural Catholic community that can serve not only the parish, but the larger community, as well. Patti feels that, in the 40-some years since Ascension’s neighborhood was bisected by the freeway, that the parish has lost its sense of serving the larger neighborhood. The school, which is attended mostly by non-parishioners, is the exception. Current efforts in this area include working with the City of Minneapolis (and Habitat for Humanity) to promote the availability of affordable housing, and striving to form a cooperative network with other religious and civic groups. Shortages of funds and staffing are among the major impediments to this work, at this time.
There are currently few programs in place specifically to serve the Hispanic community. The first priority has been to try to meet their spiritual needs. The Spanish mass is important, but much work is still needed in developing adequate support for more personal religious needs, such as preparing for marriages, first communions, baptisms, etc. There is a strong group of young Hispanic adults, which provides support and sanctuary, helps with religious and educational formation, and is the primary source of leadership in the Hispanic community. While this is a very positive thing, the group is mostly male, and a big challenge is to avoid excluding women and older people from the leadership process. A group for young women is being formed, but has not yet approached the level of success of the men’s group.

In order to foster involvement between the Spanish- and English-speaking communities, Patti believes it is imperative to find connecting points and to build personal relationships. One plan is to set up meetings, so people can connect on a personal level. The process would start with a bilingual dinner and lead to one-to-one conversations, with interpreters, if necessary. It will be important to exercise prudence and not to move too quickly with this plan, since there is some resistance to bilingual activities within the English-speaking parishioners. Patti is quick to point out that this is a safe and welcoming community, with seemingly no racial exclusion, or pretense. There exist, however, some fear of being excluded, and a general apprehension about immigrants, especially in the post-9/11 atmosphere. Many of the English-speaking parishioners are several generations removed from their immigrant roots, and have lost sight of the struggles their forebears had learning English.