

ARCHBISHOP PATRICK F. FLORES

“OBISPO DE LOS HISPANOS”

Bishop Emeritus Ricardo Ramírez, C.S.B.

Diocese of Las Cruces

The First Mexican-American Bishop

During the latter decades of the 20th and the first part of the 21st centuries, Catholicism among Hispanics in the United States has seen one of its most fruitful stages of growth. This is evident in the use of the Spanish language in the liturgy, in lay ministry, and in Catholic publications; it is the predominant language among Catholics in some dioceses. At the same time, the faith among Hispanics has inspired a profound theology that has a strong presence in prestigious universities. One of the most recent contributions in this aspect of Christian thought is the theological and moral reflection on immigration, one of the most compelling and obvious of the signs of the times that presently face the disciple communities of Jesus. The United States Catholic Conference of Bishops (USCCB) fully recognizes the importance and magnitude of this ethnic group. This recognition is manifested in the concrete way in which pastoral planning takes place at the national, regional, diocesan and parish levels.

These heightened efforts, together with the prominence of U.S. Hispanic Catholicism today, however, contrast radically with the situation of ecclesial marginalization and the neglect which Hispanic communities experienced during a great part of the modern history of the Church in North America. The long journey from invisibility in the past to the present recognition was not easy. It required a stubborn and tenacious struggle lasting over several generations. In this light, Archbishop Patrick Flores, the first Mexican-American bishop, stands out in a singularly distinctive manner, because of his moral, charismatic and pastoral leadership.

Social and Political Movements Among Hispanics

Few church leaders in the United States had the influence and impact on Latino and Mexican American lives, as did Archbishop Patrick Flores. The first Mexican-American to become a United States Bishop, his episcopal motto was *Laborabo non mihi sed omnibus*, “I will work not for myself but for others.”

One of the most significant blessings in my life was time spent working beside him as his auxiliary bishop. Archbishop Flores not only ordained me as his auxiliary bishop on December 6, 1981, in San Antonio, Texas, but he also taught me how to be a bishop. Not only was he a personal influence in my life, but Archbishop Flores also mentored and trained an incalculable number of Hispanic priests and Latino leaders.

When Father Patrick Flores was ordained Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of San Antonio, Texas, on the Cinco de Mayo in 1970, the reader at the Mass was Cesar Chávez, nationally renowned leader of the United Farmworkers of America. Bishop Méndez Arceo, of Cuernavaca, Mexico, Mexico, preached the homily. The next week, Bishop Flores brought another active social and political leader to a Mass in Houston, the bishop’s native diocese. The lay reader was Leonel Castillo, who later would be appointed Commissioner for Immigration by President Jimmy Carter.

Cesar Chávez and Leonel Castillo, whom Bishop Flores honored with participation in his episcopal ordination ceremonies, represented the Hispanic peoples of the southwest of the United States in their struggle to attain civil and human rights. The laymen were prominent in the *Movimiento Chicano*, the socio-political movement among Mexican Americans that sought the restoration of land grants, farm workers’ rights, enhanced education, voting and political rights.

An emerging awareness of the collective history and cultural values of these two men accompanied the movement, which addressed the negative ethnic stereotypes of Mexicans in the media and the American consciousness. The *Movimiento* sought to end the mistreatment of Mexicans and Mexican Americans, who, at the time were perceived as subordinate and inferior.

Asked about *La Raza*, another term for the *Movimiento*, in an interview shortly before he was ordained Auxiliary Bishop, Fr. Patrick Flores responded that he eagerly anticipated tackling voter registration, citizenship projects, and changes in public school policies, housing projects, welfare, and university education.

Fr. Flores said, “I support movements of *La Raza* because I believe in helping those who want to help themselves. I believe those in the movement as a whole, are people who want to help themselves and help others. I believe a priest should be willing to help giving guidance wherever possible.”

Fr. Flores believed that *La Raza* brought about a healthy self-identity and self-pride, and was a means of bringing about changes to better conditions of poor people.¹

Father Robert Wright, O.M.I, professor of Church history at Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, stated: “Bishop Flores brought with him the blessing of the ‘official’ Church to the *Movimiento*. He affirmed and most prominently represented the passion and the excitement of the *Movimiento* within society and the Church itself. He became one of the great leaders of the struggle of justice for all, especially among Hispanics, both in Texas and beyond. His ordination in 1970 became a ‘transformative moment’ for U.S. Hispanics.”²

When Father Patricio Flores, a Mexican-American, son of migrant workers, became a member of the hierarchy in the United States, he embodied the long struggle of Hispanics in the

United States for equal rights. He fought for fair treatment in the workplace, education, stores and restaurants, and even in the institutional Church. He knew and experienced ill-treatment. For example, he would go with his many brothers and sisters to see a movie, but only his fair-skinned siblings would be permitted to watch the film. Since he was dark-skinned, he would not be allowed to enter the theater.³ (Focal Group Meeting, 2017)

As a priest in Houston, his superiors, the bishop and his pastor, would not allow him to use Spanish except in the confessional.⁴ When he joined the incipient *Cursillo* movement in Texas, he had to go outside the boundaries of his home diocese where he was a priest, to conduct *Cursillos* for the Spanish-speaking.

He confessed later in life that he was tempted to leave the priesthood because of the restrictions placed on him and the way he was treated. A fellow *Cursillo* leader, Father Baltasar Janacek, convinced him to stay and keep bringing the Word of God and the sacraments to his people.⁵ (Focal Group meeting, 2017)

Local involvement

Patricio Flores was a great listener. It was a skill that transitioned to his homilies, where he often related the stories of real happenings in people's lives.⁶ (Focal Group Meeting, 2017)

Another characteristic of his ministerial style was the prominence he gave to laypersons and lay movements. Because of his great respect for laymen and women, he firmly believed that they were capable of filling significant roles in the work of the Church. He supported lay-led

programs, such as the Christian Family Movement, Marriage Encounter, the *Cursillo* Movement, and the *Guadalupanas*.

Before his ordination as Auxiliary Bishop in San Antonio, Father Flores sat for an interview about his expectations for his new role. Father Flores was quick to voice his desire to work with others in the *pastoral de conjunto* style.

His conviction was based on experience working out parish problems with Parish and Finance Councils. He acknowledged the goodwill and know-how of our laity today. He believed it would be foolish for a pastor to ignore such wealth and such power.

“I believe in giving parish council members authority to carry out tasks in the various fields of parochial concern....I believe that the life and vigor of a council depend on the pastor’s or the bishop’s willingness to listen and allow its members to act”.⁷

Following his episcopal ordination, Bishop Flores moved to a *barrio* parish on the west side of San Antonio, Immaculate Conception. It was probably his idea to be assigned there. He amazed the residents when he would visit the sick in their homes and take them the sacraments.

The parish encompassed what people refer to as *el barrio de la tripa*, meaning the neighborhood of animal guts. A nearby hide-processing plant inspired the nickname. The plumbing of the facility was inadequate to handle the blood and offal generated by the large volume of cattle slaughtered there every day. The blood spilled over into the unpaved streets and formed red puddles. Children played in the streets amidst the stench and the swarming flies.

Directly across from the street from the church was an offensive junkyard. A clutter of wrecked cars in the midst of high weeds provided an ideal breeding ground for rats. Old barrels

containing smelly and sticky gelatin attracted clouds of flies and cockroaches. Numerous calls to the city authorities and letters of complaint regarding these problems produced no results. This experience was the catalyst for Bishop Flores support and participation in Communities Organized for Public Service, otherwise known by its acronym, C.O.P.S.

Bishop Flores teamed with the C.O.P.S. organization. Ernie Cortez, a native of San Antonio, and a product of Saul Alinsky's Industrial Areas Foundation brought knowledge and experience to the group. In Chicago, Cortez learned the skills of community organization, like the *comunidades eclesiales de base* in Latin America, which sought to help marginalized people engage in faith-based action for social change.

C.O.P.S. gained the attention of Texas State Attorney General John Hill, who agreed to come to San Antonio to visit the *barrio* after busloads of *el barrio de la tripa* residents, C.O.P.S. leaders with Bishop Flores confronted Mr. Hill. When he saw the nauseating situation, he ordered the owner to install pollution-control equipment within a month or face a fine of \$1,000 per day.⁸ (McMurtrey 1987, 105)

While still a priest in Houston, Fr. Flores was aware that many of his parishioners, mostly male, were in jails and prisons. So, he became a self-appointed chaplain for jails and prisons in the diocese. He identified with those imprisoned because as a young man he had been arrested, allegedly for having set a building on fire, a crime he had not committed. He spent a week incarcerated before he was exonerated. He carried this concern for inmates to San Antonio when he became a bishop. He raised thousands of dollars to purchase 36,000 Bibles to distribute among the inmates in Texas.

He was ahead of his time in the ministry of restorative justice, which advocates the healing of broken relationships that result when a crime is committed. He would invite mothers of inmates on death row to his residence and cook dinner for them. By just listening to their stories, he created support groups among those mothers. He organized trips for these mothers to visit their sons in the far-away prison of Huntsville, Texas. In the archives of the Archdiocese of San Antonio, I found many beautiful letters of gratitude from inmates written to Bishop Flores.

In 1978 Bishop Flores was appointed the Bishop of El Paso, Texas, where he served for a little over a year. In the short time, he was in El Paso; he affirmed the Hispanic people's language, culture, and religious traditions. His pastoral style and message were that Hispanics were very much part of the Church and that they had no reason to consider themselves as second-class Catholics. In the words of Msgr. Arturo Bañuelas, a pastor in the Diocese of El Paso, "Bishop Flores created a space where Hispanics felt at home, a needed change at the time." In the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, continuing his pastoral style from Houston and San Antonio, Bishop Flores gave the laity prominence in the consultative bodies of parish and finance councils. He sought the involvement of the laity wherever possible. Bishop Flores seized every moment to evangelize, for him every moment was a teachable moment. ⁹

For many, he was the obvious choice when the See of San Antonio became vacant. Hundreds of inmates in Texas who had been touched by Bishop Flores' ministry were among those who wrote letters to Pope John Paul II voicing their opinion in favor of Bishop Flores. On October 13, 1979, he became the Archbishop of San Antonio.

On the Solemnity of Pentecost, June 7, 1981, Archbishop Flores issued a pastoral letter, *A New Pentecost – A Vision for the Archdiocese of San Antonio*. The process he followed was that

of *ver, juzgar, actuar*. After describing the plight of the poor in the Archdiocese, he quoted the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 4, Jesus' proclamation of good news for the poor and Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes, no. 1*. Thus, the priority in the pastoral letter is the "poor and the powerless."

"What, however, does it mean to identify with the poor and the oppressed, what does it mean to make the hopes and anxieties of all people our own as well? It means above all that all of us as a Church must be willing to influence the values and the institutions of our time that so often tend to enslave us."¹⁰ (Pastoral Letter, Flores, 1981)

Following a style of ministry known as *la pastoral de conjunto*, an impressive team of priests, composed of Fathers Albert Benavidez, Virgilio Elizondo, David García, Baltasar Janacek and Edmundo Rodríguez, S.J. helped him draft the pastoral letter.

National influence

In 1968, still a priest in Houston, Fr. Flores came to San Antonio and met with other Mexican-American priests. There they organized what grew to be a powerful and influential organization called *Padres Asociados para los Derechos Religiosos, Educativos, y Sociales (P.A.D.R.E.S.)*. It was a new national organization to transmit "the cry of our people to the decision-makers of the Catholic Church in America." In 1969, the President of P.A.D.R.E.S., Father Ralph Ruiz, wrote Archbishop Francis J. Furey of San Antonio a letter. He said, "we feel that we have a unique role as spokesmen within the Church for Mexican-American and Spanish-

speaking Catholics in the United States because most of us share the same language, culture, social mores and religious values of our people.”¹¹ (Sandoval 2006, 83)

Among the resolutions that came from P.A.D.R.E.S. were the following:

- That native Hispanic bishops be named in areas with heavy concentrations of Spanish-speaking people;
- That native Spanish-speaking priests be appointed immediately as pastors in large Spanish-speaking communities;
- That consideration be given to subsidizing low-income parishes from a national Catholic source;
- That high priority be given to inner-city projects involving priests more deeply in the day-to-day economic, social and religious life of the people;
- That the church use its influence on behalf of the striking California grape pickers; and
- That seminary recruitment and education be expanded to include programs adapted to the needs of Mexican-American seminarians and parishioners.¹² (Sandoval 2006, 84)

P.A.D.R.E.S. was strongly critical on the subject of vocations. Later, they would write another letter to Archbishop Furey saying, “We *emphatically* reject as myth that the Mexican-American has not given himself in sufficient numbers to the priestly ministry in the Church. All of us experienced during our seminary days the anxieties of many of our contemporaries who were forced out of the seminary one way or the other.” The letter went on to say, “We do not want to judge the motives of those who forced them out or kept them out, but we do know the fact that they were forced out or kept out.” (Sandoval 2006, 84)

Dom Helder Cámara gave a retreat to P.A.D.R.E.S. in April 1973, in Tucson, Arizona. Father Juan Romero wrote Dom Helder at the request of Auxiliary Bishop Flores of San Antonio, inviting Dom Helder to share his pastoral experiences and knowledge of the Latin American Church, and to speak about *comunidades eclesiales de base, conscientización, Medellín* and the theology of liberation. Those attending the retreat were not disappointed and correctly understood his *portuñol*, the combination of Portuguese and Spanish.¹³ (Interview Romero 2018)

When the Mexican-American Cultural Center (M.A.C.C.) opened in 1972, Bishop Patrick Flores was Chairman of the Board of Directors and Father Elizondo, the founding President. Flores was fully supportive of M.A.C.C. He lived on the same campus and would often engage in the programs and fiestas at M.A.C.C. As was his custom, whenever there was a Mariachi performing, he would join in singing traditional Mexican songs. (Sandoval 2006, 86-89)

Father Virgilio Elizondo envisioned a center in the United States that would respond to the pastoral and social needs of Hispanics. Father Elizondo who had been at *Medellín*, had previously studied at the East Asian Pastoral Institute in Manila, Philippines. His experience there formed the basis for the concept of the Mexican American Catholic Center (M.A.C.C.). Father Elizondo met with a group of priests from P.A.D.R.E.S. along with *Las Hermanas* Hispanic sisters at a retreat in Albuquerque, New Mexico in February of 1971. They all agreed on the idea of a formation center that would prepare priests, religious women, and laymen and women to minister with Hispanics. (Sandoval 2006, 86-89)

Archbishop Francis J. Furey of San Antonio offered M.A.C.C. the use of the former main building of the major archdiocesan seminary. A \$5,000 grant from the Texas Catholic Conference that was headed by Father John McCarthy, a classmate of Bishop Flores in the Galveston-Houston diocesan seminary was of great assistance.

Among those who taught at M.A.C.C. were visiting professors from Spain, France, Peru, Mexico, Belgium, the Philippines, and Brazil. Much of what Archbishop Flores held in his mind and heart regarding the poor and the oppressed was affirmed in his conversations with these intellectuals who came to M.A.C.C.

Among those who taught there were the father of Liberation Theology, Peruvian Gustavo Gutiérrez, the philosopher and Church historian, Dr. Enrique Dussel. M.A.C.C. also hosted Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff, Brazilian sociologist José Oscar Beozzo, Argentinian Nobel Laureate Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, Brazilian pastoralists José Marins and Teo Trevizán, Chilean pastoral theologian Segundo Galilea, and Belgian scripture professor, Father John Linskens.

M.A.C.C. taught English and Spanish and also gave a theological base for the culture of the Mexican-Americans, their history, their literature, their poetry, their cultural traditions, and their folk wisdom. It was here that Father Virgilio Elizondo developed his important theology of *mestizaje*. M.A.C.C. became a distinguished place for rich dialogical exchange among theologians and social activists and its faculty produced some of the best materials available for use among Hispanic communities, including tapes, books, music books, workbooks and liturgical vestments.

M.A.C.C. provided the bridge between the Latin American Church and North America. Some of the above mentioned Latin American theologians were introduced to

the Church in the United States through M.A.C.C. Through its innovative programs and workshops, M.A.C.C. was a significant influence throughout the Church in North America. Its novelty was in providing avenues for pastoral activity that would meet people at their level, speak their language, and give importance to their culture.

Many of us who came to study at M.A.C.C. went through a transformational moment in our lives, particularly those of us Mexican-Americans who, for the first time took pride in our rich historical past and present evolving culture. (Garcia 2010)

The programs, the theology, and methods used at M.A.C.C. all reflected the spirit and the pastoral style of Archbishop Flores. His presence was profound.

First National Encuentro

The idea of an Encuentro Nacional Hispano de Pastoral originated in New York City with Father Robert Stern and Father Edgard R. Beltrán. Father Beltrán had been Executive Secretary of the pastoral department of Conference of Latin American Bishops, C.E.L.A.M. and was part of the organizing group for Medellin and a leader in implementing its conclusions in Latin America. He suggested organizing a National Encounter in the United States to enhance pastoral planning by Hispanic Catholic leaders.

The idea was taken to Mr. Pablo Sedillo, Director of the Division for Spanish Speaking at the U.S. Bishops' Conference in Washington, D.C. At the Conference, the idea was met with great interest, especially when presented to Bishop Joseph Bernardin, General Secretary of the Conference, and Cardinal Krol, President of the U.S. Bishops Conference.

After several planning meetings the Primer Encuentro was held at Trinity College in Washington, D.C. in 1972. It brought together 250 leaders. The methodology reflected in *Gaudium et Spes* and Medellin of *ver-juzgar-actuar* was adopted. Thus the Encuentro process “examined the conditions in which people live, discerning how those conditions reflect or contradict the will of God, and acting to transform their lives and surroundings accordingly.” (Matovina 2012, 77)

There were three keynote addresses, including the representative of CELAM, Bishop Raul Sambrano Camader of Facatativá, Colombia, on the theology of pastoral ministry. Father Virgilio Elizondo spoke about pastoral planning for Hispanics. Bishop Patricio Flores gave a blistering condemnation of the institutional Church’s attitude and treatment of its Hispanic members. This talk was compelling in its impact and convinced everyone in attendance that the situation of Hispanics in the Church needed immediate and urgent attention.

Bishop Flores started by saying that he loved the Church and if he was critical of it, it was because he loved her so much. “That is why I call her *mother*,” he said. He told a story of having gone to visit a Mexican-American girl in a psychiatric hospital who had attempted to take her life. Her bed was bathed in blood since she had cut her wrists with glass from a broken lightbulb. After Bishop Flores listened to her in private for an hour, the girl finally permitted the parents to enter her room. When the parents entered, she began to shout at her mother, saying that the man she married molested her sexually. Even after complaining to her mother, the girl was accused that the molestation was her fault. The girl was only 12 years old at the time. “I yelled desperately, but you, mama, acted as if you were asleep and did not defend me,” she cried. “When I threatened to report him to my uncles, he ran me out into the street, saying that I was

wicked, that I was a prostitute, and didn't deserve to be there. I'm worthless. Mama, it is your fault that I am here. You are my mother, but you don't defend me, you don't speak up for me. You have destroyed my life." (Flores Migration Today 1973)

Bishop Flores applied this story to the plight of the Hispanics in the Church in the United States. He said, "We could apply here the words of the young girl who said, 'being my mother you did not defend me against the offender, my stepfather. You permitted that man to steal what was most sacred in my life.'

Bishop Flores' analogy was that our most sacred possessions were stolen from us Hispanics – our lands, our language, our culture, our customs, our history and our way of religious expression. We, too, are victims of oppression, discrimination, and semi-slavery. We have been poorly paid for our work; we have lived in housing worse than that of monkeys in the zoo; we have not been admitted to some schools and universities. The migrant workers continue to live in the worse conditions in this country, and the Church remains silent." (Flores Migration Today 1973)

"After giving practical suggestions as to how to structure Hispanic ministry at the parish and national levels, he finished. "I would like to conclude, reminding you here present at this Primer Encuentro Hispano Nacional de Pastoral, that we are the responsible ones to see to it that something does happen – may it not be said of us: you were my mother, but you remained silent." (Flores Migration Today 1973)

The delegates at the First Encuentro drew a list of seventy-eight conclusions and demands of the institutional Church. Among those conclusions not accepted by the Bishops' Committee for Hispanics were the demands that basic Christian communities become a priority.

Also, that women be ordained as deacons; that mature married men be considered as candidates for the priesthood; and that the training of all seminarians in all the dioceses of the U.S. should include the Spanish language and Hispanic culture. Demands accepted and ultimately implemented were that the Division for the Spanish Speaking is upgraded to a Secretariat at the Bishops' Conference. That regional offices for Hispanics be established; that there be a Bishops' Committee for Hispanics; that more Hispanic bishops be ordained; and that there be sections or special editions of diocesan newspapers in Spanish. (Sandoval 2006, 100)

The Encuentro process was repeated at regional and diocesan gatherings with bishops, some of which became quite confrontational. A Second Encuentro was held in 1977, followed by the Third in 1985. These Encuentros led to the training of new leaders and considerably more attention given to Hispanic needs by the episcopacy. In 1983 the U.S. Bishops approved the Pastoral Letter, "*The Hispanic Presence: Challenge and Commitment.*" The letter called Hispanics a blessing from God and authorized the Third Encuentro, which led to a National Pastoral Plan for Hispanics.

Becoming the Bishop of Hispanics

Soon after he became auxiliary bishop in San Antonio, Patrick Flores began to receive invitations from dioceses, parishes, and organizations to speak. In an article in the diocesan newspaper of Davenport, Iowa, August 10, 1972, just two years after he was ordained a bishop, it was reported that he had already visited migrants and Hispanic communities in 43 states. (Waterman 1972)

His travels also took him overseas to U.S. military installations where he brought the message of the Gospel to Hispanic servicemen and women. His message always drew hope and inspiration to those minority groups. He pleaded for Christian love and solidarity to relieve the terrible plight of the poor. To his advantage, his archbishop, Francis Furey, who had been instrumental in his appointment as his auxiliary, recognized the need for him to do this in the service of Hispanic peoples throughout the nation and permitted him to travel often outside the Archdiocese of San Antonio. Thus, Bishop Patrick Flores became the bishop of U.S. Hispanics.

When Fr. Robert F. Sánchez was appointed as Archbishop of Santa Fe, New Mexico, in 1974, Bishop Flores had the idea to design liturgical vestments to reflect Hispanic culture. He worked with the Cordi-Marian Sisters in San Antonio to create colorful chasubles and stoles for Archbishop Sánchez' ordination. Colorful *zarapes* sewn into the vestment designs were in keeping with the spirit of the times among Hispanics to identify with their culture and to celebrate it, even in the liturgy. Bishop Flores encouraged and inspired new liturgical music that incorporated the Spanish language and Hispanic musical styles. Around the exciting times of liturgical renewal, the Mariachi Mass had been introduced by Bishop Méndez Arceo in his cathedral in Cuernavaca, Mexico. The Mariachi Mass grew in popularity throughout the United States. It was also during this time that Hispanic church communities introduced *matachín* dances during the Mass, specifically in Masses honoring Our Lady of Guadalupe. All this enhanced what Bishop Flores had said in the interview days before his ordination as bishop, “I feel ‘La Raza’ is bringing about a self-identity and self-pride that is very healthy.” (Flores Interview 1970, 1-H)

Relations with Latin America

Archbishop Flores related directly with the Church in Latin America on numerous and varied occasions. He chaired the U.S. Bishops' Committee for the Church in Latin America from 1983 to 1985, and in this capacity, he would visit dioceses that needed financial assistance from the U.S. bishops. When he addressed the Mexican Bishops' Conference, his message to the bishops gave them a better understanding of their Mexican and Mexican American brothers and sisters in the United States. He helped eliminate the stereotype held by many Mexicans that that time that the Mexican race in the U.S. was somehow inferior, "lesser Mexicans," and referred to as *pochos*. Some even thought of us in the United States as traitors. Archbishop Flores was successful in breaking down these stereotypes, and aided by the theological work of Virgilio Elizondo at M.A.C.C., upholding the new cultural reality of Mexican Americans.

On another occasion, he visited the church in Cuba and met with the Prime Minister Fidel Castro. As is well known, the Catholic Church under Communist rule was largely persecuted, members of religious orders had been expelled, and Catholic schools closed. Bibles and other religious materials could not be printed, and no church group had access to television, radio, or the press. Priests were not allowed to teach or hold other professional positions. There had been 800 priests in Cuba before the Revolution, and only 200 remained when Flores and his delegation visited Cuba. The meeting with Castro lasted 6 ½ hours, during which time Archbishop Flores appealed for the release of Cuba's many political prisoners. He advocated that their human rights be recognized, and explained to Castro that political prisoners' relatives in the United States were prepared to serve as their sponsors. He also reminded Castro of the freedom

of religion and that he should allow priests and others to come as missionaries to Cuba.

(McMurtrey 1987, 129-134)

As a result of that meeting, 21 foreign priests, and a group of Mother Theresa's Sisters of Charity were allowed to enter Cuba. Eleven political prisoners were permitted to immigrate to the United States. Flores, however, was not allowed to visit inmates in Cuban prisons. He visited Cuba two other times, each time promoting religious freedom and the release of political prisoners. He and his pastoral team were told not to hand out any religious articles. When he visited a leper hospital, he asked to pass out pictures of his mother, and he was given this permission. He proceeded to hand out holy cards of Our Lady of Guadalupe. "Here," he smiled, "I give you my mama, but she is your mama too." (Sandoval 2006, 121-133)

In August 1976, Bishop Leónidas Proaño of Riobamba invited 17 bishops, women and men religious, and priests as well as 20 laypeople, among them Nobel Peace Prize winner Adolfo Pérez Esquivel of Argentina to a fraternal meeting in Ecuador to exchange pastoral experiences. Among those invited were four Hispanic bishops, Archbishop Robert Sánchez, Auxiliary Bishop Patrick Flores, Ecuadorian Auxiliary Bishop Juan Arzube, of Los Angeles, and Auxiliary Bishop Gilbert Chávez of San Diego. Also present was Mr. Pablo Sedillo of the Secretariat for Hispanic Affairs of the U.S. Bishops' Conference in Washington, and Fr. Edgard D. Beltrán, associate to Mr. Sedillo. The late afternoon of the second day of the meeting, 50 military police, armed with machine guns, arrested them. After five hours of travel, they were placed in the police barracks of Quito. They were held for four days. During that time, Bishop Flores, against police instructions, celebrated the Eucharist. Through the intervention of the Vatican they were released, eight of them were transported to the Colombian border and eventually boarded a plane

in Bogotá to the United States. The reason given for their arrest was the accusation that they were Communists and their meeting was to plan a coup against the government of Ecuador. (Beltrán Acosta 2016, 76)

Conclusion

Archbishop Patricio Fernando Flores was one of the most courageous persons I ever met. He was unafraid to speak out for the oppressed. He knew first-hand the Mexican American struggle for equality; in his own life, he experienced racial and cultural bias, unequal treatment, discrimination, and injustice. He recognized that these evils must be eradicated from our country, a country that stands for “liberty and justice for all.”

Flores was not only a powerful listener; he was equally capable of speaking powerfully about the issues, and always in a non-judgmental way and never with insult. “We should not let our differences divide us; we should let our differences enrich us.”¹⁴

The results of his pioneering efforts are evident. More Hispanics in the United States hold positions of leadership and are making significant contributions in business, education, the military, medicine, the law, politics, as well as in the U.S. Church.

His inspiration lives on in the minds and hearts of the people he mentored during his lifetime. I am blessed to be numbered among them. In the U.S. Church, there are now over Hispanic thirty bishops, of whom twelve are ordinaries. Two are two archbishops. One holds the office of the Vice President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and who will probably be the next President of the Conference.

We have come a long way from the days when speaking Spanish was prohibited in the Church, and only allowed in the confessional. Today, we print bi-lingual (English and Spanish) official Church documents to include liturgical books. Rituals now incorporate Hispanic customs and traditions. Please think of Archbishop Flores the next time you attend a wedding or a Quinceañera.

Yes, we have come a long way, but more needs to be done in the areas of immigration, education, prison and jail reform, drug use and drug trafficking and just and living wages.

I recall Archbishop Flores would often compliment Church choirs at the end of a Mass saying, “You did a good job! But, you can do better!” Thus he challenged them to become even better liturgical musicians. Today he would tell us, “You have come a long way, but you have much more to do. Do it!”

ENDNOTES

- 1 Interview with Bishop Patrick Flores San Antonio Express-News, May 3 1970 p. 1-H
- 2 Focal Group Meeting in San Antonio, Texas August 31, 2017
- 3 McMurtrey, Martin Mariachi Bishop: The Life Story of Patrick Flores. Corona Publishing Company, San Antonio Texas 1987
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- 7 Migration Today, "The church diocesan and national" September 1, 1973
- 8 Waterman, Denison. Official Diocesan Paper, Diocese of Davenport, Iowa. August 10, 1972.
- 9 Beltrán Acosta, Edgard R., "Una Historia de los Hispanos Latinos en Estados Unidos, 2016, p. 76
- 10 Conversation with Msgr. Arturo Bañuelas, January 22, 2018
- 11 Interview with Fr. Juan Romero, January 23, 2018
- 12 Most Rev. Patricio F. Flores Pastoral Letter: A New Pentecost; A Vision for the Archdiocese of San Antonio, June 7, 1981
- 13 Interview Romero 2018
- 14 Archbishop Patricio Fernando Flores , September 11, 2002, Inter-faith Memorial Service, Basilica of the Little Flower, www.archsa.org