

# Vocations from abroad

Gonzalo Cadavid-Rivera, a young man from Colombia came to Baltimore in 2004 to enter the seminary for the Archdiocese of Baltimore. I had the opportunity to meet him and introduce him to a couple of parishes with Hispanic Ministry. I remember we went to St. Patrick on Broadway Street for Sunday Mass. It was Mother's Day. There were flowers handed to moms, special blessings, songs to Mary and a home cooked breakfast for everybody. However, all of these acts to honor our mothers and the emotions of many immigrants who have left their mothers back home were making Gonzalo very homesick. He had recently left his family, his profession, his friends and his country. He was experiencing the pain of separation, an inevitable sacrifice in order to follow the call to be missionary in another country.

History repeats itself. A young man aspiring to be a priest arrived to New York one April in the year 1836. He had sailed close to 40 days on board of the *Europa* from his native Bohemia. His name was John Neumann. He came with the conviction that God wanted him to be a priest and a missionary in America. On those days, many priests journeyed from Europe to minister to the thousands of people who went overseas to America in giant waves of emigration. Today as thousands of people from all over the world come to America and in large numbers from Latin America, God continues to move the hearts of men and women who feel the call to serve today's new immigrants.

Nevertheless, the lack of priests in the immigrants' country of origin does not allow for a proportional response. In the Archdiocese of Baltimore, there are nine external priests serving the Hispanic community and six American priests for a population according to the last census update of about 90,000 people of Hispanic origin. Among the American priests, the Redemptorist Congregation merits special mention, since they have served to Latin American immigrants at St. Michael and St. Patrick Church for the past 25 years and more recently at St. Mary's in Annapolis. Other religious communities have also served throughout the years, the Jesuits, the Franciscans and others. Some of the diocesan clergy are learning Spanish and Hispanic culture to better minister to Hispanics in their parishes, a significant commitment that is very much appreciated by the immigrant community.

Immigrant priests who come to provide sacramental and pastoral care to immigrants follow a process of adaptation like any other immigrant. The “cultural shock” might be stronger in some than others. The challenges of learning a new language, different cultural values, and a different pastoral approach are very demanding. But most of them adapt, learn, and in time they appreciate even more the gifts that they bring to the whole church as well as recognizing the richness of the local church.

Natives or immigrant priests who serve in the Hispanic community are edified and supported by the love and affection of the people. They see in the Latinos a hunger for God, devotion for Jesus, Mary and the saints expressed in public forms of devotions. They ask for prayer vigils, spiritual retreats and to learn more about the Bible and their faith. Young adults, most of them men, meet frequently to pray the rosary, sing and enjoy fellowship with their peers. The ministry of priests many times consists in a pastoral of accompaniment, even for those who do not speak Spanish a shake of hand at the end of Mass is interpreted as “*él está con nosotros*,” “he is with us.”

Gonzalo is now very close to his aspiration; on June 13 he will be ordained together with Hector Mateus-Ariza (who is also from Colombia), Marc Lanoue, and Ernest Cibelli. So I went this past Mother’s Day to St. Michael in Overlea, where he is ministering. I went to the Spanish Mass hoping to ask him if he remembered that first Mother’s Day. I couldn’t see him. He was serving as deacon in the English Mass. I thought how much he has accomplished in these past five years. He is now moving comfortably from one community to the other. In his ministry, he will be able to model for others how to be “bridge people” promoting mutual understanding, recognizing and accepting the challenges of our differences, but united intrinsically by our one faith. Let’s pray for these four men who are going to be ordained June 13, that they may be filled with the fervor that inspired St. John Neumann to be a priest and a missionary.

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