

Latino clergy, faith leaders rally behind Black Lives Matter movement

by [Alejandra Molina](#) in the [July 29, 2020](#) issue



Protestors march at a Black Lives Matter demonstration in Los Angeles on May 30. (RNS photo by Alejandra Molina)

To pastor Rosa Cándida Ramírez, it's evident that the same institutional systems that dehumanize immigrants perpetuate the mistreatment of black Americans.

"We cannot say that immigrant lives matter if we can't say that black lives matter," said Ramírez, 31, who helps lead the largely Latina and immigrant La Fuente Ministries in Pasadena, California.

At La Fuente, it's common for church members to speak about their plight and rights as immigrants. Now, Ramírez said, they're exploring what it means to be a congregation that also talks about microaggressions, colorism, and the struggles of black communities.

La Fuente bills itself as an intergenerational, intercultural, and bilingual congregation. In Ramírez's view, the church cannot embody those things and not

say anything right now in support of Black Lives Matter.

Days after nationwide protests erupted condemning the police killing of George Floyd, La Fuente issued a pastoral statement affirming that black lives matter and denouncing what La Fuente referred to as the “public lynching” of Floyd and the “militarization of police forces in cities.”

The statement referred to Jesus of Nazareth as a dark-skinned Palestinian Jew and announced that it’s time for the Latina church to join the African American struggle.

“We cannot remain silent because we are shaped by Jesus’ good news of liberation, dignity, compassion and justice!” the statement read. “Anything that opposes the gospel realities must be denounced as powers of death.”

Latinos, many from younger generations, have been among the different ethnic groups marching in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement in protests and demonstrations across the nation. They’ve held signs declaring “Black-Brown Unity” and “Brown People for Black Liberation. “Tu lucha es mi lucha” (your fight is my fight) has been a rallying cry.

And for a number of Latino clergy and people of faith, it’s imperative that this message of unity be present in their churches.

While the United States is steadily becoming less Christian, Latinos remain more likely to describe themselves as Christians and to attend religious services than white Americans are, according to a recent Pew Research Center study.

Because of the strong role faith plays in Latino communities, pastors play an important part in elevating any issue, according to Robert Chao Romero, a professor of Chicana/o studies and Asian American studies at UCLA.

Chao Romero, who authored *Brown Church*, a book on the history of Latino Christian social justice activism, said he’s seeing more churches and faith leaders speaking out against antiblack racism than ever before.

While he knows some Latino clergy will shy away from saying “Black Lives Matter” because of the political implications of the movement, Chao Romero said faith leaders don’t need to address the issue from a political stance but from a biblical one, “from the perspective that says unjust racial policing is a sin.”

Chao Romero points to what's called the Galilee principle: "What human beings reject, God chooses as his very own."

For many Latino theologians, Jesus' connection with Galilee—the region where Jesus of Nazareth carried out his ministry—marks him as a marginalized and borderlands person, which correlates with the rejection of US Latinos.

"As black and brown communities, we're the Galileans of today," said Chao Romero.

Through scripture, Jesuit priests from Dolores Mission Church, a Catholic parish in a working-class Los Angeles neighborhood, have declared their support for Black Lives Matter.

In his June 7 homily, Brendan Busse stressed the importance of community over individualism. The country, Busse told congregants in Spanish, is immersed in its original sin—racism.

He displayed a yellow poster with bold letters declaring, "Órale Black Lives Matter." Emblazoned with Spanish slang, the protest sign was an expression of Latino solidarity for the Black Lives Matter movement.

"Las Vidas Negras Importan," Busse said, reading the poster in Spanish. "Are we capable of recognizing this? Is there something in us that prevents us from saying this? Do we have a resistance toward this phrase?"

Ramírez's La Fuente congregation is tackling similar questions.

Ramírez said church members are discussing the antiblackness inherent in community standards that value light skin. They're also discussing the violence that has erupted in some protests, after an older congregant said he didn't comprehend why people were looting during demonstrations.

Some first-generation members who have lived through civil wars and dictatorships in Latin America also fear for their children who are out protesting.

"On one hand, we are giving theological language to the younger generation for their activism," said Marcos Canales, also a La Fuente pastor, who wrote the pastoral statement. "At the same time, for the first generation, we're giving them the space to tell their own stories of injustice."

Canales, 38, is also working on building relationships with black pastors and community leaders in the area to learn and become involved with their activism. La Fuente, he said, will do more to advocate for police budget cutbacks to go toward community services. They'll also mobilize to be more present at protests and rallies.

"It's going to take time for us to learn together," Ramírez said. —Religion News Service