

“I Love You and There Is Nothing You Can Do About It”: Pastor Miguel Balderas’s Love Disruption of White Hegemonic Church Culture

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ABSTRACT

Rev. Dr. Miguel Balderas grounds his ministry to majority-white congregations in a decision to love and impose this love upon his congregants, whether or not they return it. This choice is embodied in both the content and form of Pastor Miguel’s lived theological approach, which he terms “*liturgia viva*,” or living liturgy. This runs counter to what he calls a “social-club” mentality, shaped by the nostalgia for a “large (white) church” past and characterized by self-segregating behavior, power struggles between competing factions, and the importance of an individual’s status being based upon merit or wealth. One component of Pastor Miguel’s *liturgia viva* is the repetition of specific phrases in worship attempting to rewrite cultural habits of the majority-white, English-speaking congregation. This essay focuses on four phrases that Pastor Miguel employed in worship during the author’s ethnographic fieldwork at Millian Memorial United Methodist Church in 2014–2015. Using a close hermeneutical examination and critical social discourse analysis of the performance of these phrases, this essay offers a rearticulation of Pastor Miguel’s approach and its lived theological resources for developing anti-assimilationist forms of multiculturalism.

In the spring of 2013, Pastor Miguel Balderas received a call from his superior, the district superintendent (DS). The bishop, the DS’s superior, had received an angry letter from a member at Millian Memorial United Methodist Church, where Pastor Miguel was set to start as lead pastor on July 1 of that year.

The bishop had appointed Pastor Miguel there specifically to help Millian with their mission to become a multicultural community that reflected the majority-Hispanic population that lived in the surrounding neighborhood. The letter demanded that the bishop reconsider the appointment of Pastor Miguel to the church, claiming that he was unfit, and included a photograph that had been posted on Facebook as primary evidence for this argument.

Pastor Miguel had the DS describe the photograph. It depicted Pastor Miguel sitting on a couch, shirtless and draped in a pink robe, with butterfly clips and a tiara in his hair, and a somewhat startled look on his face. As Pastor Miguel told me about the call, I remembered the exact photo—it was hard to forget:



[Photo taken by a family member, permission granted by Juan Carlos Balderas and his family]

I remembered commenting about it on Facebook two years earlier, and I also remembered that it was not even a picture of Pastor Miguel, but of his twin, Juan Carlos.



[A recent picture of Juan Carlos and Pastor Miguel, photo taken by a family member, permission granted by Juan Carlos Balderas, Miguel Balderas and their families]

In response to the DS, Pastor Miguel told me, he had said, “Well, first of all, the person in the photo is not me, but my twin brother, Juan Carlos,” whose teenage daughter had dressed him up as a joke. “But secondly,” he had said, “even if it were me—why would it matter? It’s a family photo and none of the church’s business.” I asked him how he felt about it, and he said that he and Ruth (his wife) had had a good laugh about it that night.

I forgot about this incident until I began interviewing Millian members two years later, in the spring of 2015, when a member brought it up, remarking that I had probably heard the story in the course of my research. The white interviewee spoke quickly, in what struck me as a confessional tone, about the incident. The white interviewee spoke quickly, in what struck me as a confessional tone, about the incident and recounted that the lay person not only sent the picture to the DS, but had also posted it on Millian’s Facebook page. The white leader in the congregation had done so after researching Pastor Miguel’s “style” and making a “hasty” judgment that Pastor Miguel was not the right pastor for Millian. However, the interviewee also spoke in the leader’s defense by stating t The white interviewee spoke quickly, in what struck me as a confessional tone, about the incident and recounted that the lay person not only sent the picture to the DS, but had also posted it on Millian’s Facebook page. The white leader in the congregation had done so after researching Pastor Miguel’s “style” and making a “hasty” judgment that Pastor Miguel was not the right pastor for Millian. hat the person did not do it because Pastor Miguel was Latino. Even though we had not been speaking about race, the interviewee felt it necessary to argue that racial prejudice

was not a motivation for the leader's actions. When I asked the interviewee how this person would know Pastor Miguel's "style," given that he had not yet begun his ministry there, the interviewee thought that maybe the person had gone to his church or talked to other people, but she was not sure.¹

What we do know is that the leader felt compelled to personally investigate Pastor Miguel and produce "evidence" in order to question his qualifications and position as an Elder in the United Methodist Church. The evidence is revealing in itself, since the "offensiveness" of the photo is apparently generated by the way Juan Carlos is depicted in the shot—as a half-naked Brown man in a tiara and a pink robe. This first of many attempts to thwart Pastor Miguel's authority and ministry appears to have been based on queerphobic assumptions that the church leader believed would cause not only the local community but the bishop of the Baltimore-Washington Conference to censure Pastor Miguel and prevent his appointment to Millian later that July. While this leader's effort ultimately failed, publishing the decontextualized photo on the church's Facebook page provided the first impression some Millian members had of their incoming pastor.

EXCAVATING AND REARTICULATING PASTOR MIGUEL'S LIVED THEOLOGY OF LOVE

At every new church appointment, for one full year, Pastor Miguel preaches on a selection of scripture from the Revised Common Lectionary through the thematic lens of the scriptural concept of "love."² On its own, love is a vague term that can be made meaningful in a multiplicity of ways. Pastor Miguel chooses to narrowly define the concept of love through his interpretation of Christian scripture and tradition. Although this takes many forms throughout the course of his preaching, the base definition of love for Pastor Miguel is grounded in terms of God's choice to love the world and offer salvation to all people. However, it is not only through God's work in Jesus Christ, celebrated in his birth, death, and resurrection, but also through the continued power and action of the Holy Spirit. Pastor Miguel teaches through this theme that 1) love is a particular type of choice and 2) choosing to love can affect and change the world through the power of the Holy Spirit.³

At Millian, he added a repeated phrase to worship that first year to underscore and emphasize this theme of love. He began declaring: "I love you and there is nothing you can do about it," and eventually, through its consistent repetition in the context of worship, it became a recognized liturgical statement by the congregation. He first encountered this statement during his time at First United Methodist Church in Hyattsville, Maryland. The senior pastor, an African-American named Vance P. Ross, would bellow it out every Sunday worship service as a way to initiate the Passing of the Peace—the point in the liturgy where the worshippers turn to one another and offer each other signs of the peace of Christ. To this self-proclaimed multicultural congregation, Pastor Ross would say, "Tell your neighbor: I love you and there is nothing you can do about it."

Alternatively, in Millian's context, Pastor Miguel would make this declaration directly to his congregation. He writes that this statement:

tiene una intención muy específica, en mi caso es RECORDAR, y afirmar que LA

DECISION DE AMAR es parte de nuestra liturgia, de nuestro ministerio como discípulos. De hecho la parte central de nuestro ministerio basado en el amor. Y practicarlo el domingo en un espacio seguro como lo debe ser la iglesia. Una práctica sencillita para los que no se atreven a amar porque nunca les enseñaron.

has a very specific intention. In my case the intention [of using this statement in worship] is TO REMEMBER and affirm that THE DECISION TO LOVE is part of our liturgy, of our ministry as disciples. In fact [it is] the central part of our ministry based in love. [And the intention is] to practice [making this decision to love] each Sunday in a safe space like the church should be. A simple practice for those who do not dare to love, because they were never taught [how to decide to love].⁴

Through this self-declaration, Pastor Miguel emphasizes and models the importance of love as a decision that each person makes. He is teaching by example; he is modeling the process of making a decision to love by declaring that he loves everyone sitting before him regardless of how they have treated or will treat him.

I have known Pastor Miguel since 2000, when I began as a student at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C. and had the opportunity to work as a student assistant pastor at Hyattsville. During those years, Hyattsville grew as a multicultural congregation and I was a witness to and participant in the development of Pastor Miguel's multicultural training program. In 2014, when my role shifted to participant-observer in the ministry at Millian and interviewer of my own mentor, it struck me how difficult it would be to articulate his approach to multicultural ministry without both a thick description of his habits and a close reading of the sources that he is drawing on from scripture and Christian tradition.⁵ His method of discipleship involves virtually no PowerPoint presentations, reading lists, or specified Bible study, which are often used for the purpose of multicultural training. Pastor Miguel, with a few exceptions, did not offer Millian any formalized sessions of this type. Instead, his ministry—as a whole—can be characterized as one organic, all-encompassing multicultural training session. Millian congregants were exposed to new logics, embodied new values, and participated in new forms of leading together as part of the fabric of everyday faith and practice. This was the training Millian received from Pastor Miguel, which he summarizes as follows:

Cuando gente de diferentes grupos étnicos dirigen, ustedes están en “training.” Cuando la directora de VBS es Latina, ustedes están en “training.” Cuando ahora la directora de Escuela Dominical es Latina y además mi esposa, ustedes están en “training.” Cuando ahora los ayudantes de los profesores en Escuela Dominical no tan solo son Blancos, sino también Latinos y Africanos, ustedes están en “training.”

When persons from different ethnic groups are leading, you all are in “training.” When in VBS [Vacation Bible School] the director is Latina, you all are in “training.” When the director of Sunday School is now Latina, and moreover my wife, you all are in “training.” When now that the teachers’ assistants in Sunday School are not only white but also Latinos and Africans, you all are in “training.”⁶

He rejects approaches that involve formulaic or programmatic paradigms that are “portable” from one context to another. Multicultural community is not something, Pastor Miguel believes and Paulo Freire might say, that can be taught in a traditional classroom in which a teacher provides conceptual content that the students are expected to memorize and learn. For Pastor Miguel, multiculturalism can only be taught in the doing of multiculturalism. It is found in his standing before his congregation, declaring his love for them, and teaching them to love by modeling his own love of them. The only way to study his form of multicultural training is through ethnography followed by a re-articulation of this already-living theological approach through the mode and genre of lived theology.

Lived theology, for the purposes of this study, refers to an approach born out of the work of Charles Marsh and co-collaborators involved with The Project on Lived Theology at the University of Virginia.⁷ Charles Marsh states that “Lived theology is an apt expression for the foregrounding of embodied particularity in theological narrative. Lived theology then pursues both a descriptive and edifying purpose: namely, that of keeping narrative space open to the actions of God in experience and understanding the social consequences of theological ideas.”⁸ The subjects of scholarship in the study of lived theology include not only well-known persons of faith, like Martin Luther King, Jr. and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. It also includes those whose contribution to their communities and society is theologically rich but may be overlooked by popular histories, like Fannie Lou Hamer, John Perkins, the women teachers of Torah in Jerusalem found in Vanessa Ochs’s work *Words on Fire*. Lived theology is as interested in the lives of average practitioners as it is in the lives of household names. Pastor Miguel is unknown to all but those who have encountered him; however, his approach to multicultural ministry is responsive to our current historical context in which, while segregation has been outlawed, de facto segregation persists, especially in church communities. It is an approach that is theologically rich and offers insights for those concerned with the challenges and possibilities for racial reconciliation in religious and secular spaces. A study of Pastor Miguel’s lived theology, therefore, is an attempt to rearticulate, through close examination, how Pastor Miguel conceptualizes God’s Kingdom and its implications for human community on earth. It is Pastor Miguel’s approach in carrying out this mandate that is under examination in this study.

This study demonstrates that through phrases repeated in worship, Pastor Miguel is attempting to rewrite cultural habits of the majority-white, English-speaking congregation. He does this by using scripture to develop multicultural habits and potentialities that are not governed by modes of assimilation, but instead by those drawn from concepts of the Kingdom of God. This is not a social-scientific, ethnographic approach in service of developing a general theory of how multicultural churches behave, nor is it explicating their essential characteristics.⁹ Instead this study shines a light on Pastor Miguel and rearticulates his approach, offering possible scriptural logics and resources for those interested in examples

of, and possibilities for, multicultural churches and communities. Pastor Miguel has been a collaborator in researching and articulating this work, and continues to collaborate with me as a visiting lecturer in my course on the Insurgent Multiculturalism of Beloved Community, which features his approach as a case study.

In this study, I focus on four phrases that Pastor Miguel repeatedly employed in worship during my ethnographic fieldwork at Millian.¹⁰ The initial phrase, “We are One Millian, I am the pastor of One Millian,” was employed almost immediately by Pastor Miguel upon his appointment at Millian as a response to the deep division he encountered between the two majority-white groups at Millian, one who attended services at 9 a.m. and the second at 11 a.m. He engaged the three remaining phrases, 1) “I love you and there is nothing you can do about it;” 2) “We are a great family, not perfect, but a great family;” 3) “We are good people, because we have accepted Christ, now we must follow him and become his disciples,” as part of a three-year sermonic curriculum centering on the themes of Love, Family, and Discipleship. Pastor Miguel utilized these phrases with a majority-white and English-speaking congregation, whose mission, before he arrived, had been to become multicultural by reaching the growing Spanish-speaking immigrant population in the surrounding neighborhood.

Pastor Miguel’s lived theology illuminates his approach of deconstructing white hegemonic spaces for the purpose of making space for non-white, non-English-speaking persons to become full participants of a local church community. The purpose of this work is not to provide a program prescription for other potential multicultural ministries—this would directly contradict the very nature of Pastor Miguel’s approach. Rather, illuminating and rearticulating his approach offers patterns of acting out and reading Christian tradition that serve as lived theological resources for developing anti-assimilationist forms of multiculturalism.

PASTOR MIGUEL’S CHURCH CONTEXT: MILLIAN’S SOCIAL-CLUB MENTALITY

The strong nostalgia for the former glory that once was Millian contrasts markedly with members’ attitudes regarding the community’s current situation.¹¹ Although long-term members acknowledge that reaching persons in the community is necessary for the church to survive, I found through participant-observation and interviews that many congregants do not embrace the multicultural mission. Rather, they are skeptical of this strategy that, they feel, the church hierarchy in the Baltimore-Washington Conference has imposed upon them. There were long-term members I interviewed who felt that everything possible had been done to reach the surrounding community, which is overwhelmingly made up of non-English-speaking, Hispanic immigrants. They had given them food, clothes, fun entertainment, and yet none of the outreach had yielded significant numbers of new members from the community. Language is often cited as a barrier to reaching the community.¹² One member thinks most Hispanics are Catholics and, therefore, would not consider joining Millian.¹³ One member repeatedly told me that they would leave the church if there was a morning Sunday service that was delivered in Spanish with English translation.¹⁴

As Michael O. Emerson states, mandated multiracial congregations tend to be at higher risk of instability, since members resist the change that is being imposed upon them from outside the congregation.¹⁵ In the case of Millian, although the decision to become multicultural had been made through a process that involved input and approval from lay church leaders who represented the congregation as a whole, in 2015 there was still a perception that this decision had been imposed upon Millian by the church hierarchy. The resistance and ambivalence I witnessed in my field work seem to suggest that most long-term members were not embracing the changes becoming a multicultural community would entail.

The Baltimore-Washington Conference appointed Pastor Miguel to Millian to help the church grow as a multicultural congregation through outreach to the surrounding community. However, after attending a number of "Home Group Meetings" hosted by various members of Millian, Pastor Miguel decided that Millian would first need to resolve certain issues as part of the process of becoming a multicultural church.¹⁶

Issues between Millian's two Sunday services had begun recently, in 2012. In 2011, Francis Asbury United Methodist, another historically majority-white Church, was growing. Its Korean population had grown so significantly that the Baltimore-Washington Conference had appointed a Korean pastor, and the church was undergoing renovations to accommodate the new and younger membership. While renovations were underway, Asbury rented space from Millian. Once the renovations were completed in 2012, the members of Asbury returned to their church, except for a group about ten to twelve elderly, long-term members who remained behind and joined Millian.¹⁷ Those who stayed behind did so after feeling slowly ousted by the new Korean population. Things at Asbury had worked for them as long as the long-term members had total control; however, when the Korean members of the congregation started bringing in more money and expected to have more say in the decision-making of the church, the conflicts began. In an interview, a former Asbury member said of the experience, "We welcomed the infusion of money that we got each month from them. But over a period of time the tail started to wag the dog. They were making demands that sometimes we had problems with. We had other cultural differences. Linguistic issues. We loved many of their people, because they were just wonderful folks, but it just got intolerable for us."¹⁸ In the Home Group Meetings at Millian held for Pastor Miguel, these former members of Francis Asbury UMC, who all worshipped at the 9:30 a.m. service, expressed fear that he and the associate pastor, Braulio Torres, who is also Mexican, were there to repeat the pattern they had experienced at Asbury. Their fear was that instead of transitioning to a Korean church, Millian would eventually become a Latino church.¹⁹ At the same time, Pastor Miguel heard that the newer Asbury members felt alienated from the long-term Millian membership, who mainly worshiped at 11 a.m. One Asbury member told me in an interview that the 9:30 service had been labeled from the very beginning "the Asbury service," since all the new members worshipped at that time.²⁰ Both Pastor Miguel and the former Asbury members I interviewed reported that the Asbury members continued to feel like outsiders and not fully welcome even after becoming official members, spearheading various ministries, and feeling devoted to their new church home.

In light of these findings, Pastor Miguel judged that Millian's stated mission and vision were not fully supported in practice by a significant portion of the active members at Millian. The mission and vision of MMUMC when he first arrived were as follows:

Our Mission: Reaching new, unchurched, diverse, and young people for Christ.

Our Vision: To be a dynamic, spirit-filled, multicultural, multigenerational, church numbering in the thousands, impacting our neighborhood, nation and world through radically inclusive community building.

Pastor Miguel said he learned early on that Millian members were fixated on “insiders” and “outsiders” and resurrecting what they saw as a glorious past (a past that was, in fact, highly homogeneous) with thousands of members and well-attended ministries and activities.²¹ Unlike the culturally diverse vision, with its expectation of direct engagement with the surrounding neighborhood, in Pastor Miguel’s estimation the elderly members of Millian were working out of a nostalgic, homogenous family model that Pastor Miguel characterizes as a “social-club” mentality that precludes the diversity that the Kingdom of God espouses.

Pastor Miguel’s understanding of the Kingdom of God is grounded in a prophetic form of multiculturalism, in which he believes God calls all Christians to participate, that is grounded specifically in the story of Pentecost as found in Acts 2 in the New Testament. In the event of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit “filled” the disciples and they began to speak in “other languages as the Spirit gave them ability.” All the Jews who had come from various countries back to Jerusalem to celebrate the festival of Pentecost heard what they were saying in their own languages (Acts 2:1–4). In their doctoral thesis on multicultural ministries, Pastor Miguel and Pastor Rene Knight state: “Pentecost is a clear representation of heaven, where your nationality, language, and color of skin do not matter but all of us will be together in a permanent fiesta. This fiesta begins here and now as an eschatological present. Here and now we can live the reality of the Kingdom of God that was inaugurated in the person of Jesus upon coming to be born as a man with all of the possibilities and limitations of a human being, even as we anxiously await the consummation of this kingdom.”²² The possibility of living out the Kingdom of God today opens up the possibility of changing unjust structures and oppressive realities that make up the daily life of many who live on the margins of society. For Pastors Miguel and Rene this is a personal experience: “As Hispanics / Latinos, we have received the power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim to the four winds the good news of the Kingdom of God in this country that is so Christian. In the end, the name of God will be honored and glorified. We believe that God has empowered us. We have decided to believe God and not the system that exploits us, persecutes us, ignores us, and makes us invisible. We are not invisible; we have been here a long time, and God has heard our cries. We can live as disciples, loving and out of our own decision, choosing not to hate, seeking good even for those who seek the worst for us.”²³

For multicultural ministries to be successful, people from different cultures need to learn how to listen to one another: “We must be open to learning new ways, new images, and new interpretations of the same truth. We must listen to the experiences of cultures that are other than our own.”²⁴ Listening is not a passive activity, but one that leads to concrete changes in how people relate to one another, especially how relationships of power are established. In other words, multiculturalism is a group project, where leaders from different backgrounds make decisions together. Pastor Miguel’s characterization of an integrated

multicultural congregation is based on two criteria. First, leaders must represent the demographics of the church and surrounding community, with power being shared through mutual exchanges within teamwork-based structures. Second, “Se come la comida de todos,” which may be translated as: “One eats the food of all” or “Everyone eats everyone else’s food.” To be clear, this is not an “International Day” model of sharing, in which one day is set aside specifically to learn about the various cultures within a community, but rather a practice of eating food from all different regions—everyone eats everyone else’s food—that is integrated into the fabric of everyday life as a standard practice.

This description of multicultural ministries stands in contrast to the concept of family that Pastor Miguel encountered at Millian. Regarding this, Pastor Miguel states:

El concepto de familia era volver a rebuscar lo que hubo el pasado. Lo mismo, sueñan en esos años, los '60s, los '50s donde la familia toda venía a la iglesia, los niños venían a la escuela dominical, donde los jóvenes venían a la iglesia a jugar. y era el centro, no había club social—no había un centro comunitario—era la iglesia.

Ahora, ya no saben que pedir. Porque la iglesia, así como en la escuela todo es tan diverso que no saben porque sus hijos están allí o porque sus nietos van a esas escuelas. Lo que dijo un viejito, “Porque mi nieto tiene que comer en lugar de hot dogs y chips, tiene que comer pupusas—porque la gran mayoría de los alumnos son este salvadoreños? Y ellos deben decidir? No! deben decidir los Americanos!”

The concept of family was to go back and find what happened in the past. It’s always the same, they dream about the past, the ’60s, the ’50s, when the whole family came to church, the children went to Sunday School, and teenagers came to church to play. And [the church] was the center [of everything]. There was no social club—there was no community center—it was the church.

Now they don’t know what to ask for, because the church, just like in the schools, is so diverse that they do not know why their children are there or why their grandchildren go to those schools. An elderly man said: “Why does my grandson have to eat *pupusas* instead of hot dogs and chips—because the majority of the students are Salvadorans, and they should decide? No! The Americans should decide.”²⁵

Since its establishment in the 1950s, Millian has been characterized by its homogenous white culture, and it is difficult for members of this culture to consider anyone that does not conform to it as being a part of their family. Instead, when people of other cultures are engaged by Millian, it is through transactional relationships such as the one described by the former Asbury member above. As an elderly, white church in decline, the long-term majority-white members of Asbury appreciated the influx of members and money that helped keep their church open, but sharing decision-making power with the Koreans was “intolerable.” In their view, one culture, the Korean culture, began to dominate and pushed out the other dying one, the majority-white, English-speaking culture. This view of family, which is based in monocultural gathering and power, is what Pastor Miguel refers to as a “social-club” mentality.

In her work studying churches that meet the sociological definition of being multiracial (no more than any one race or ethnic group makes up more than 80 percent of the congregation), Korie Edwards argues that most remain culturally white:

There were sometimes cultural practices and markers that represented racial minorities in these congregations, such as a gospel music selection, a display of flags from various countries around the world, or services translated into Spanish. Yet the diversity did not seem to affect the core culture and practices of the religious organizations. That is, the style of preaching, music, length of services, structure of services, dress codes, political and community activities, missionary interests, and theological emphases tended to be more consistent with those of the predominantly white churches I had observed. These churches exhibited many of the practices and beliefs common to white churches within their same religious affiliation, only with a few additional ‘ethnic’ practices or markers. It was like adding rainbow sprinkles to a dish of ice cream. In the end, you still have a dish of ice cream, only with a little extra color and sweetness.²⁶

Falling in line with Korie’s observations, even though Millian had turned toward the Hispanic community through a Hispanic ministries plan funded in 2012 by the Baltimore-Washington Conference, their instrumental, us / them approach encouraged only assimilationist forms of outreach.²⁷ Millian wanted more Hispanic members, but only set out to reach them in ways that ensured Millian’s culture would remain the same. In other words, Hispanics were welcome as long as they conformed to set structures and / or were assimilated into Millian’s dominant white culture.

The social-club understanding of Christian family at Millian has existed not only in relation to divisions between Millian and the external community, but also between the two groups of worship—labeled the “Asbury” and “Millian” services. Pastor Miguel judged that the participants in these two services operated as two different congregations, each with their own culture. In this case, those who attended the 11 a.m. “Millian” service were the “insiders,” while those who attended the 9:30 a.m. “Asbury” service considered themselves the “outsiders.” A former Asbury member reports that long-term Millian members refused to participate in ministries run by former Asbury members. Moreover, the interviewee reported that when

a member from the 9:30 a.m. service once attempted to serve themselves from “a big spread” laid out for coffee hour, a long-term Millian member reprimanded her, saying: “That is for the eleven o’clock service—don’t touch.”²⁸

“WE ARE ONE MILLIAN, I AM THE PASTOR OF ONE MILLIAN.”

Once he began to understand Millian’s context, Pastor Miguel began publicly declaring, repeatedly in worship and through other pastoral communications, “We are One Millian” and “I am the pastor of One Millian.” The purpose of this statement was to make it clear that he is the pastor of everyone at Millian²⁹ by claiming the pastoral authority and responsibilities that are afforded to him by his appointment by the Baltimore-Washington Conference. He hoped to discourage any perception that he was only there to be the pastor for Latinos or Hispanics or that he did not actually have pastoral authority over the white members.

Additionally, Pastor Miguel also refused to put potential members into situations that he believed would subject them to racist, assimilationist, or patronizing white leadership who had not yet been trained in how to engage in multicultural group decision-making and fellowship with persons from other cultures as equal participants. As Eric Law, one of Pastor Miguel’s former professors, states: “The church needs to teach the white middle and upper class to listen. The church needs to encourage those who are perceived as powerful to practice the spirituality of choosing the cross. The instinct for the powerful is to act, control, and command. The church should challenge the powerful to go against that instinct. The church should invite them to get out of the ‘doing’ mode and enter into a ‘being’ mode of listening. The Gospel challenges them to give up and redistribute their power to the powerless.”³⁰ Pastor Miguel was concerned with protecting potentially new Hispanic members, who might be vulnerable due to economic insecurity, from being manipulated by those in more powerful positions. In his experience, powerful people have a tendency to use gifts or favors as a means of causing someone less powerful to be indebted to them, and members who are gained from such approaches do not end up as full participants in the life and leadership of the church. Rather, they are relegated to roles in the church that maintain the comfort and culture of the majority group. Pastor Miguel reports that this often means that new members who are not white and do not speak English as their first and primary language feel that they need to carry out the work dictated by the white, English-speaking members in order to continue to receive financial help or resources from the church. In one interview, a long-term white member from MMUMC was asked about multiculturalism. He gave the example of a Hispanic woman helping him in the kitchen during a past event as his ideal image of how people from different cultures could work together:

It was a hot night and everyone wanted drinks. I wanted to put ice in every cup but the line overtook me and there was [a Hispanic member of Millian], and she was putting ice in the cups, and I was pouring, and I’d run out of lemonade, and she’d take the pitcher back, and she stayed for the whole serving and then she cleaned up. And the next thing she’s at the

sink washing the utensils we used. Beautiful lady . . . really, really nice.³¹

Although the idea of Hispanic people filling stereotypical roles like the kitchen help is likely not the explicit expectation of all Millian members, this wistful interview response offers evidence that Pastor Miguel's misgivings about subjecting a vulnerable population (such as Hispanic immigrants) to a community that is unaware of its own cultural chauvinism are not unreasonable. He feels the need to protect such vulnerable communities from structures that inherently encourage those in power to take advantage of them by offering them resources in exchange for their presence.³²

Therefore, instead of launching any major initiatives to encourage members of the surrounding community to start coming to Millian, Pastor Miguel focused his attention on training the members who were already present. He began with a three-year program focused almost exclusively on the members who attended the majority-white, English-speaking morning services. Pastor Miguel's goal for worship was for it to be a training ground, where parishioners would be taught how to love, how to be a family, and how to be disciples together. He believed that if the training was successful, the congregation would gain the tools and the language needed to make a decision together about their future in the community—whether or not to in fact become multicultural.

Pastor Miguel got to know the Hispanic community in other ways while dedicating himself to healing Millian's internal divisions and slowly modeling alternative forms of outreach to the community.³³ For Pastor Miguel's multicultural community model to work, it would need to have broad-based practical (not just theoretical) support from a significant number of Millian members.

TRANSFORMING A SOCIAL-CLUB CONGREGATIONAL CULTURE THROUGH *UNA LITURGIA VIVA*

Pastor Miguel takes the liturgy, the religious act that he has judged that his parishioners value most, and harnesses its ritual power as a mode of communal transformation. Pastor Miguel characterizes this process as slow and requiring "*una liturgia viva*" (living liturgy). *Liturgia viva* is a term Pastor Miguel coined when he rejected my assertion that he was engaging "the liturgy" of worship as part of his multicultural training program. From his experience, "liturgy" indicates a checklist of components parishioners understand to make up a "perfect" form of worship: hymns, sermon, certain prayers, etc. Instead, Pastor Miguel refined my assertion by classifying the type of liturgy he engages as "living." For him this attribute is necessary and denotes a form of active training in Christian discipleship, where participants try out new habits in what Pastor Miguel calls the safety of a worship setting. In this case, a sanctuary is akin to Augusto Boal's *Theater of the Oppressed*, where "the main objective is to change people—'spectators,' passive beings in this theatrical phenomenon—into subjects, into actors, transformers of the dramatic action." For Boal, "Perhaps the theater is not revolutionary in itself, but it is surely a rehearsal for the revolution."³⁴ In an analogous way, for Pastor Miguel, the worship setting or sanctuary is a place where congregants can learn

new habits and rehearse their way out of white hegemonic church culture into becoming disciples of Jesus Christ—becoming the Church in the world structured around the values of the Kingdom of God. In this view, the liturgy is a tool and not an end unto itself. Therefore, the liturgy can and should be modified in order to emphasize and support long-term pedagogical goals such as the three-year, thematically structured sermonic curriculum.

In the fall of 2013, based on what he learned in house meetings with parishioners, Pastor Miguel chose three themes that structured his sermonic curriculum for Millian: Year 1: love, Year 2: family, Year 3: discipleship. For Pastor Miguel, the scriptural and theological teachings that come with these three themes work to dismantle personal beliefs and ministry structures based on a social-club mentality, paving the way for a new church culture based on the values that structure the Kingdom of God. According to Pastor Miguel, these themes operate not as progressive building blocks, but rather promote a process of organic growth in spiritual understanding and practice. Therefore, he did not abandon the theme of love once he began the theme of family, but rather the theme of family grew out of the theme of love, and the theme of love has continued to be emphasized in his sermons and teachings beyond the first year.³⁵

YEAR 2, THEME OF FAMILY: “WE ARE A GREAT FAMILY, NOT PERFECT, BUT A GREAT FAMILY.”

Year 1’s theme of love—meaning to choose to love as God has done—with its repeated phrase “I love you and there is nothing you can do about it,” feeds into Pastor Miguel’s second-year theme of “family.” Choosing to love in Millian’s context means that the worshippers who attend different services needed to realize that they were all one family or “One Millian”—not three separate congregations.³⁶

The phrase he used—at almost every worship service—to shape and constantly remind the congregation of this is: “We are a great family, we are not perfect, but a great family.” He first coined and developed this phrase at Oxon Hill to help reinforce the unity between the various ethnic and racial groups, but Pastor Miguel reports that this phrase has come into its own more fully at Millian, where the teaching about family is sorely needed. Of this statement, he writes:

Así como en esa iglesia, en todas las iglesias, hay mucha gente que creyéndose perfectos, no pueden admitir que como familia somos gran familia, pues en su “perfección” los demás están mal y ellos bien. Así que esta declaración es también la opción de recuperar el sentido de familia en contra de la tendencial individualista de este país, no somos islas, sino que vivimos en comunidad. Además que la vida de discipulado y la vida en el reino de Dios es una vida comunitaria.

As is the case in [Millian], in all churches, there are many people who believe themselves

to be perfect and cannot admit that as family, we are a great family, since in their own “perfection” everyone else is bad, while they are good. So, this declaration is also the option to recuperate the feeling of family that counters the individualist tendency in this country, we are not islands, but instead we live in community. Moreover, the life of discipleship and in the Kingdom of God is a life lived in community.³⁷

Learning how to decide to love as God has loved leads the members of Millian to another choice: whether or not to love each other as family, whether to begin to live life as a community and not as a group of individuals. By declaring that Millian—One Millian—is a great family, Pastor Miguel is providing a relational framework distinct from the one that Millian had been operating in before he arrived. This statement encourages Millian’s congregants to move away from their emphasis on individual human will and to adopt God’s will for Christian community, which embraces human diversity in all its expressions—an expanded version of family that goes beyond genetics and bloodlines.

It must be noted that Millian has not magically become a united family just because Pastor Miguel uses these declarations and preaches through the lens of this theme of family. In fact, in 2015 the divisions between congregants of the three different services remained. However, by consistently declaring Millian a family, Pastor Miguel understands himself to be laying the groundwork for the possibility that one day Millian will be united as One Millian. This will be accomplished by giving them the opportunity to “recuperate the feeling of family” for at least one hour a week within the context of worship.

YEAR 3, THEME OF DISCIPLESHIP: “WE ARE GOOD PEOPLE, BECAUSE WE HAVE ACCEPTED CHRIST, NOW WE MUST FOLLOW HIM AND BECOME HIS DISCIPLES.”

In Pastor Miguel’s belief system, if Millian is a great family, united in God’s love, such a family responds to God’s call to follow Jesus as disciples, together, in community.³⁸ During this year, alongside the other two phrases he introduces a third: “We are all good people, because we’ve accepted Christ, now let’s follow him.” He developed this phrase specifically for Millian, beginning with only just the first part—“We are all good people, because we’ve accepted Christ”—and then adding in the coda for the theme of discipleship in the third year.

When I first heard this phrase early in my fieldwork, it struck me as odd, because I had never heard Pastor Miguel say anyone was “good” from the pulpit in this declarative fashion. When I inquired about the phrase, Pastor Miguel said that he developed it because he had received complaints from leaders in the congregation that he did not publicly praise the “good” work of particular leaders during worship, nor did he acknowledge in general how “good” Millian members are as people—due to all the money they tithe, all the money and charity they give to immigrant neighbors, etc.³⁹

In response to this concern, Pastor Miguel invented the phrase that acknowledged their need to be called “good,” but with a theological twist: “because you’ve accepted Christ.” This shifts the focus from

their goodness being merit or status based (i.e., how much money or time has been given or how long they have been members) to it being based in a decision to choose to accept Christ. Within the divisive and status-focused congregation of Millian this declarative statement is radically equalizing. The long-term member who has been tithing for years is just as “good” as a new worshipper who cannot afford to tithe and perhaps even subsists through charity from the church. The final part of the phrase invites Millian worshippers—united in God’s radical and equalizing love as family—to go beyond accepting Christ as savior, beyond attending to their own community, and beyond participating in weekly rituals: to minister with those outside of the church.⁴⁰

SUBJECT POSITIONING AND SOCIAL CATEGORIZATION OF THE THEMATIC STRUCTURE OF PASTOR MIGUEL’S SERMONIC CURRICULUM

Pastor Miguel speaks all of these declarations while standing in front of his audience, the congregation of worship participants on Sunday mornings at the English-speaking services.⁴¹ As he does so, he occupies the full authority afforded him by his office as an Ordained Elder in the United Methodist Church and as Millian’s Lead Pastor. As I mentioned earlier, once introduced, a declaration remains a part of his expanded repertoire of multiple declarations. He does not drop them once he has moved on to a new theme as part of an expanding organic process.

STANDING IN ECCLESIAL AUTHORITY AND CLAIMING PERSONAL SOCIAL CATEGORIES

Although loving is mandated by Christian faith, as with any normative ethos, believers do not always act in accordance with it, and through this declaration Pastor Miguel models the practice of deciding to love, which is a decision that each person must make of their own volition. In the first part of the declaration, “I love you,” Pastor Miguel positions himself as the only one who has agency and renders the audience passive. As the subject, “I,” Pastor Miguel loves the “you,” who are the participants in Millian’s worship. The second part of the declaration, “and there is nothing you can do about it,” underscores the autonomy and agency that Pastor Miguel has when making this declaration. It makes explicit that the “you” in the sentence has no role to play in this declaration—it is truly a personal decision of the “I” that cannot be affected by the “you” in any way. Even if members of the speaker’s audience reject the speaker’s action, there is nothing they can do to stop it, but neither do they have any obligations associated with the decision that Pastor Miguel has made. While they are not obligated to love Pastor Miguel in return, they also cannot escape or negate the love he has declared for them. Pastor Miguel is asserting his own power and authority with regard to whom he decides to love.

As stated above, this statement includes two distinct sets of people. One is Pastor Miguel, the

individual, and the “you” is everyone else he is addressing in MMUMC on a given Sunday morning at the English-speaking services. The “I” in this case is an individual who can be categorized, though not exhaustively, as a brown-skinned, Mexican, male immigrant with United States citizenship, who is an ordained Elder in the United Methodist Church in the Baltimore-Washington Conference, who holds a Master of Divinity and a Doctor of Ministry, and who speaks in non-Standard English and fluent Spanish.

By making this declaration before a majority-white English-speaking Protestant congregation in “broken English,” Pastor Miguel is disrupting social structures that most of the members of Millian are used to. This is evidenced by members’ frequent criticism that his accent impedes their ability to understand, even though many refuse to use available hearing-aid equipment in order to hear him more clearly.²⁷ For Millian, this is the first time they have had to submit to a lead pastor who has not spoken in Standard English, and some question his ability to lead because of it. In order to solidify that this power structure is indeed different from what many in his congregation are used to, Pastor Miguel asserts his surprising (to some) authority with his declaration of love.

Even though this declaration uses social categories to invert presumed realities for certain of these social categories, it only does so for the “I.” For the “you,” the social categories to which this pronoun refers cannot be exactly determined, since the declaration is made in a public worship service and not to a specific demographic or social category of persons. Although the majority of attendees at the morning services are English-speaking and white, there are a few non-white members, with visitors and family members often in attendance. Moreover, at the 11:00 a.m. service there are some Spanish-speaking members who take advantage of simultaneous translation. It is not possible to narrow the group down to a particular category since it is possible that some visitors or family members might attend without even considering themselves Christians. Regardless of people’s various categorizations, when Pastor Miguel declares, “I love you and there is nothing you can do about it,” he does so to whomever has made the choice to be in the room. Instead of a social category, the “you” indicates a group united by a common action—attending the worship service at Millian.

STANDING WITH MILLIAN AS DISCIPLES OF JESUS CHRIST

Unlike the first declaration that centers on Pastor Miguel’s identity and personal decisions, the next two declarations about family and discipleship include descriptions and judgments about Millian. In these declarations, he does not situate himself outside of the group, as an individual in relationship to his congregation. Instead, using the subject “we,” he positions himself as part of the group that he is describing. This means that the judgments about Millian’s identity that he is making and their implications apply not just to whom he is addressing, but also to himself as well. He does not stand outside of the Millian congregation but decides to be a part of it. This is important since his goal is to model a form of Christian discipleship in which members of the community decide to move forward as family, not as separate individuals, to follow Jesus as disciples.

The “we” of these declarations is equated with two groupings: “a great family” and “good people,” while the third grouping of “Christ’s disciples” is held out as a future possibility and goal for the “we” to become. Again, as discussed above, the “we” does not refer to a demographic or social category, but rather to a group of people who have acted in unison by attending worship at Millian on a Sunday morning. The term family, in this case, does not refer to a specific humanly constructed category. Since everyone in the room is a member of the family, this is not referring to the typical understanding of family, which is linked to genetic connection or relation to persons by blood or heritage. Instead the term family is structured around the idea that those who are followers of Christ become a family by the power of the Holy Spirit, despite their distinctions arising from categories that are constructions of human beings, such as race, language, and status.

The second category to which the “we” is equated is “good people.” Through the third declaration, Pastor Miguel redefines the category of “good people” from those who participate in a variety of actions or those who exhibit particular attributes that lead others to judge them as “good” (listening to your mother, being patient or kind, recycling, staying faithful in marriage, giving money to the church, going to service every Sunday, participating in Bible study, etc.) by narrowing it down to one single action—“accepting Christ.” This declaration states that anyone who accepts Christ, regardless of their virtuous behaviors, is a “good person.” He is not saying that people can be good *only if* they accept Christ. Rather, he is making the point that the only thing that makes people good *within* Christian community is the fact that they’ve accepted Christ. Limiting “good” to those who “accept Christ” negates any other social status that may be accrued in a host of other ways. It also allows new Christians and Christians that are new participants to enter with the same status as Christians who have attended Millian for many years. All are “good,” and no one, in this respect, holds a higher status than anyone else.

The final category that the “we” has the potential to be is “Christ’s disciples.” Although the “we” are “good people” because they have “accepted Christ,” this does not mean, according to Pastor Miguel, that they are disciples. To become Christ’s disciples requires yet another shared action: the “we” must follow Christ. Again, this categorization is tied to scriptural and theological themes of salvation and discipleship. “Accepting Christ” grants you a certain status in the community, but becoming “Christ’s disciples” requires “following Jesus.” Like the other two categories just discussed, “Christ’s disciples” is a category that does not indicate a social categorization based on socially constructed group features. Rather, according to Pastor Miguel, it is a category of people who choose to engage in a shared action. In other words, those who are “Christ’s disciples” are those who follow Jesus.

PASTOR MIGUEL’S LIVED THEOLOGY: THE THEATER OF DISRUPTIVE CHRISTIAN LOVE

By repeating these phrases in worship, much like a kindergarten teacher repeatedly states the classroom rules on how to play nice, Pastor Miguel is molding his congregation with language that disrupts the status quo of white hegemonic church culture. Through this subtle change in language, for example, “we”

signifying a group that chooses to worship together, rather than a group identified as white or Latino, the lived theology of the congregation is restructured within the context of worship. In this theater of worship, these declarations are acted out and tried on, and old ways of being have the potential of shifting into new ones. In this space, room is opened up for those who have dominated to practice submitting to a new set of structures where former aspects of status such as money, race, and family connections no longer determine their identity and value. At the same time, those who have been marginalized are invited into leadership roles alongside members of the dominant group and treated as full participants regardless of their lack of what is normally tied to status or a set of socially constructed attributes. Lived theology is found in the language of the phrases, in their declaration, and in the liturgical form they take in the worship setting. Lived theology is also found in the participation in this worship where the disruption of white hegemonic culture through the practice of the Kingdom of God culture is taking place. In other words, the lived theology of Pastor Miguel is found within this training itself, within the possibility that churches dominated by white hegemonic culture can be transformed into training centers for the Kingdom of God that are restructured for one purpose—to be able to make the decision to love.

The Facebook incident that “welcomed” Pastor Miguel to Millian in 2013 was one of a myriad of actions that attempted to sabotage his leadership and that constantly questioned his authority, ability, intelligence, morality, and personhood during his appointment there. In the face of it all he chose to impose and model love. This choice is embodied in both the content and form of Pastor Miguel’s *liturgia viva*, which runs counter to Millian’s “social-club” mentality, shaped by the nostalgia for its “large (white) church” past and characterized by self-segregating behavior, power struggles between competing factions, and the importance of an individual’s status being based upon merit or wealth. Pastor Miguel’s declarations are an imposition of power; but they work to reshape a community of power and dominance in relation to a community that has traditionally been marginalized, for the purpose of becoming one people where all are full participants. Although all individuals participating in Pastor Miguel’s form of discourse in worship have the power to decide for themselves if they will love, no one has the power to force anyone else to make the same decision. The decision to love and to be a family means that the community (not the hierarchy) decides how they will walk and struggle in faith together and ultimately if they will embrace multicultural ministry with the surrounding neighborhood or not.

Lived theology does not occur in the abstract—it is contextually determined and driven. In the case of Pastor Miguel, it is a dynamic movement that at once confronts white hegemonic church culture and works to reshape it into Pastor Miguel’s understanding of the biblical culture and values of the Kingdom of God. For Pastor Miguel, weekly Sunday worship serves as a training ground that offers the opportunity for those limited by white hegemonic culture to develop new embodied habits shaped by a local liturgy of the Kingdom values of love, family, and discipleship. Only through this training would the majority-white members of Millian be equipped to live out Christian discipleship as one united family of God, with the potential to embrace a form of multicultural ministry that would not tokenize or instrumentalize their non-white neighbors.

For one hour a week during worship, hegemonic white culture was disrupted. The embodied liturgy declared that no one person was better than anyone else, no matter their status or good works, and that

there were no homogenous self-segregating groups, but just one family, made up of a diverse set of people who are united by the power of the Holy Spirit. Pastor Miguel's *liturgia viva* reinforced these values to heal Millian's internal divisions and allowed them to transform, for at least one hour during Sunday worship, from a social club into One Millian.

NOTES

1 MMUMC Member D and Kelly West Figueroa-Ray, Formal In-Person Interview, audio recording, June 22, 2015. I have replaced the pronouns in this citation with "this person" to protect the identity of the leader who submitted the letter.²

This ecumenical publication rotates through much of the Old and New Testaments over the course of three years and is used by the Catholic Church and most mainline Protestant Churches. Each Sunday, the Common Lectionary includes four scriptures that (for most Sundays of the church calendar) include selections from the Old and New Testament writings. Often, these four scripture texts express similar themes or reference the same events, however at other times, it is hard to discern a connection between them. See an example: "Revised Common Lectionary," accessed August 4, 2020, <https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/>.

3 Miguel Balderas, Formal Interview #7, 5:50pm, interview by Kelly West Figueroa-Ray, audio recording, August 3, 2015.

4 Miguel Balderas to Kelly West Figueroa-Ray, "Re: frases," August 15, 2015. All interviews and correspondence with Pastor Miguel was conducted in Spanish. Translations into English are mine and were reviewed with Pastor Miguel to ensure the translations captured the meaning he was communicating.

5 My fieldwork began in 2014, six years after I had stopped working directly with Pastor Miguel at First Church in Hyattsville, Maryland. Since I had maintained contact with him and his family, I still needed to negotiate the boundary between my roles as researcher and participant. I worshipped at Millian, participated in the community's many ministerial and administrative activities, and worked with Pastor Miguel and the ministerial staff when I was asked. I endeavored to be mindful of how new observations made in the context of my fieldwork and my past experiences working with Pastor Miguel informed my analysis.

6 Miguel Balderas, Informal Interview—SPRC packet, interview by Kelly West Figueroa-Ray, field notes, March 30, 2015; Kelly Figueroa-Ray, "2015 Summer Fieldnotes," 2015.

7 Recent publications include: Charles Marsh, Shea Tuttle, and Daniel P. Rhodes, *Can I Get a Witness?: Thirteen Peacemakers, Community-Builders, and Agitators for Faith and Justice* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019); Peter Slade, Sarah Azaransky, and Charles Marsh, eds., *Lived Theology: New Perspectives on Method, Style, and Pedagogy* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017); Peter Slade, *Open Friendship in a Closed Society Mission Mississippi and a Theology of Friendship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Susan R. Holman, *God Knows There's Need: Christian Responses to Poverty*, 1st edition (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Sarah Azaransky, ed., *Religion and Politics in America's Borderlands* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2013); Peter Slade, Charles Marsh, and Peter Goodwin Heltzel, eds., *Mobilizing for the Common Good: The Lived Theology of John M. Perkins*

(Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2013); Russell Jeung and Gene Luen Yang, *At Home in Exile: Finding Jesus among My Ancestors and Refugee Neighbors* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016). For more information about the Project on Lived Theology see <http://www.livedtheology.org/overview/>. Jennifer M. McBride, *Radical Discipleship: A Liturgical Politics of the Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017).

8 Slade, Azaransky, and Marsh, *Lived Theology*, 7.

9 In terms of genre, this study is a theological biography—as found in the following works: Charles Marsh, *Strange Glory: A Life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), Charles Marsh and John M. Perkins, *Welcoming Justice: God’s Movement Toward Beloved Community* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2018), and Marsh, Tuttle, and Rhodes, *Can I Get a Witness?*; The method of close-reading utilized in this paper is influenced by the critical discourse theory found in: Margaret Wetherell and Jonathan Potter, *Mapping the Language of Racism: Discourse and the Legitimation of Exploitation* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1992)—specifically their categories of subject positioning and social categorization.

10 The efficacy of his use of these phrases or the effect they may have had upon the congregants is not the thrust of my inquiry; rather I am examining the phrases as pieces of Pastor Miguel’s lived theology.

11 MMUMC Member L and Kelly West Figuroa-Ray, Formal In-Person Interview #1, audio recording, June 24, 2015; MMUMC Member L and Kelly West Figuroa-Ray, Formal In-Person Interview #2, audio recording, June 24, 2015.

12 MMUMC Member C and Kelly West Figuroa-Ray, Formal In-Person Interview, audio recording, June 22, 2015.

13 MMUMC Member S and Kelly West Figuroa-Ray, Formal In-Person Interview #1, audio recording, July 29, 2015.

14 MMUMC Member B and Kelly West Figuroa-Ray, Formal In-Person Interview, audio recording, April 6, 2015, 01:01:00–01:05:00.

15 Michael O Emerson and Rodney M Woo, *People of the Dream Multiracial Congregations in the United States* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008), 60–61.

16 The Baltimore-Washington Conference of the United Methodist Church strongly recommends these encounters as a way for the pastor and congregants to get to know each other and for the pastor to begin to identify the values and leaders of the congregation. See: “Getting to Know New Pastors: Home Group Meetings,” Religious Organization, *BWC Toolbox: A Resource of the Baltimore-Washington Conference of the United Methodist Church* (blog), April 27, 2015, <http://web.archive.org/web/20160227234054/http://bwcumc.org/toolbox/small-group-meetings/>.

17 See “Report of the Pastor” in: MMUMC Staff, “Charge Conference Report 2012,” Annual Report, Charge Conference (Rockville, MD: Millian Memorial United Methodist Church, 2012); MMUMC Members J & K and Kelly West Figuroa-Ray, Formal In-Person Interview, audio recording, June 24, 2015, 4:05.

18 MMUMC Members J & K and Figuroa-Ray, Formal In-Person Interview, 02:09–03:14.

19 Balderas, Formal Interview #7, 5:50pm, 45:40–46:22.

- 20 MMUMC Members J & K and Figueroa-Ray, Formal In-Person Interview, 40:30–41:30.
- 21 Balderas, Formal Interview #7, 5:50pm, 42:20 & 49:20.
- 22 Miguel Balderas and Rene Knight, “Responding to the Implementation of the National Plan for Hispanic/Latino Ministries: Baltimore-Washington and Peninsula Delaware Conferences” (Thesis, Washington, DC, Wesley Theological Seminary, 2007), 48.
- 23 Balderas and Knight, 49.
- 24 Balderas and Knight, 27.
- 25 Balderas, Formal Interview #7, 5:50pm, 49:20–51:09.
- 26 Korie L. Edwards, *The Elusive Dream: The Power of Race in Interracial Churches* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Edward’s ethnographic observations have been corroborated by broader study that demonstrates a tendency for minorities in multiracial congregations to conform to white cultural models explaining persistent poverty as a problem of the individual rather than a systematic problem, which tends to be the understanding of minorities that worship in African-American and Hispanic churches that are monocultural. See: Ryon J. Cobb, Samuel L. Perry, and Kevin D. Dougherty, “United by Faith? Race/Ethnicity, Congregational Diversity, and Explanations of Racial Inequality,” *Sociology of Religion* 76, no. 2 (2015): 177–98, <https://doi.org/10.1093/socrel/sru067>.
- 27 These assertions are drawn from a close hermeneutical reading of the plan included in Chapter 4 of my dissertation titled *Beloved Community in Multicultural Contexts: The Lived Theology of Pastor Miguel Balderas*.
- 28 MMUMC Members J & K and Figueroa-Ray, Formal In-Person Interview, 40:39–41:29.
- 29 Balderas, Formal Interview #7, 5:50pm, 53:01–53:29.
- 30 Eric Law, *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb: A Spirituality for Leadership in a Multicultural Community* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1993), 49.
- 31 MMUMC Member R and Kelly West Figueroa-Ray, Formal In-Person Interview, audio recording, June 26, 2015, 56:50–57:10.
- 32 Miguel Balderas and Kelly West Figueroa-Ray, Formal Interview #8, 6:30pm, audio recording, August 3, 2015, 09:00–10:31.
- 33 Along with this process, Pastor Miguel was engaged in an overhaul of Millian’s administrative and financial system. He called in an auditor from the Baltimore-Washington Conference to help bring Millian’s financial management in line with the United Methodist Church Discipline, which contains rules agreed upon by the denomination about all things related to church life, including how to administrate a church community. Moreover, he brought a team together of Millian members to develop the official policies and procedures of the church, which is a requirement of the Discipline, but had never been done before at Millian. These procedures outline Millian’s particular rules regarding how to handle finances, procedures related to building use, and guidelines about childcare

(called Safe Sanctuaries), among other topics related to administration at Millian. Although this administrative restructuring process is part of Pastor Miguel's integral approach, I limited my study of his approach to his scriptural discourse in worship and in its lived expression found in the 2015 Vacation Bible School program.

34 Augusto Boal and Charles A. McBride, *Theatre of the Oppressed* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1993), 122.

35 At his previous church, Oxon Hill UMC, Pastor Miguel also employed this thematic approach to preaching, but the themes had been different. Oxon Hill's minority population made up a significant portion of congregation and the majority of the participants had embraced their congregation's identity as multicultural. Although much work had to be done to equalize the power dynamics and to move minority members into positions of power, according to Pastor Miguel, the Oxon Hill congregation did not exhibit the stark internal divisions he found upon arriving at Millian. See: Miguel Balderas, Formal Interview #6, 4:45pm, interview by Kelly West Figueroa-Ray, audio recording, August 3, 2015.

36 Balderas, Formal Interview #7, 5:50pm.

37 Balderas to Figueroa-Ray, "Re: frases," August 15, 2015.

38 Balderas, Formal Interview #7, 5:50pm.

39 Miguel Balderas, Informal Interview following One Worship Service, interview by Kelly West Figueroa-Ray, field notes, November 2, 2014; Balderas to Figueroa-Ray, "Re: frases," August 15, 2015.

40 Although he does occasionally use these phrases at the 2 p.m. Spanish-speaking service, he does not do so with as much frequency. While I am focusing on the training program Pastor Miguel has implemented for the English-speaking services, he is simultaneously training those members in the Spanish-speaking service with an approach that is not focused on giving up power in order to relate to others, but rather one that empowers them as full participants in Millian's church life. Eric Law describes this simultaneous approach this way: "[T]he church needs to encourage people of color to gather in communities of their choosing. In these communities of faith, they are encouraged to find their identity and strength just as the powerless disciples gathered together before the Pentecost event." According to Law, "It is essential that these two approaches be taken together so that those in power and the powerless can meet in the middle where they can interact on equal ground," Law, *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb*, 49. While this is an important aspect of Pastor Miguel's approach to ministry, I decided to focus on his approach with the English-speaking congregation, because the majority of his effort has been focused on their transformation, and not on growing the numbers of the small Spanish-speaking service, until Millian as a whole has decided to become multicultural. Although beyond the scope of this study, Pastor Miguel's ability to implement these mirrored approaches simultaneously should be taken up in further examinations of his lived theology.

41 MMUMC Member D and Figueroa-Ray, Formal In-Person Interview, 51:30–54:00.