

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

ANN-MARIE VILLASANA
NOVEMBER 30, 1998

ANN KAPLAN: It's November 30, 1998, and I'm here in Durham talking with Ann-Marie Villasana. Am I pronouncing it correctly?

ANN-MARIE VILLASANA: You're pronouncing it right.

AK: And this is Ann Kaplan with the Southern Oral History Program, for the New Immigrants Project. [Laughter.] So, why don't you start by telling me, so I'm sure I have it, the proper spelling of your name. Is it Ann-Marie?

AV: Ann-Marie, A-N-N hyphen M-A-R-I-E V-I-L-L-A-S-A-N-A.

AK: Can you tell me when and where you were born?

AV: I was born on January 3, 1957 in Chicago, Illinois.

AK: To parents who were from that area originally?

AV: No, my father was from New Jersey. He was the only son of Irish immigrants who arrived during the 1920s, and he went to Chicago with a religious project. He worked for Friendship House, or he was a member of Friendship House, which was a settlement house movement in the 1940s kind of related to-- I can't think of the name of it now, a Catholic group. It was a settlement house movement whose main purpose was to work toward racial reconciliation, racial integration, civil rights, before the official civil rights movement. So people in this movement would move into poor African-American, inner-city neighborhoods, and just get to know the people, and just witness with them from a Catholic perspective.

And my mother was from Minnesota. Her ancestors were Prussian immigrants that settled in Minnesota in the 1820s and just were farmers. And she came from a social

work perspective and she ended up in the same Friendship House movement in Chicago that my dad did, and that's where they met.

AK: And what were their names?

AV: James Fallon and Virginia Lowe.

[Pause.]

AK: Around what ages were they when you were born? And did you have siblings?

AV: I'm the middle of five siblings. I guess my mom was about thirty when I was born. My dad was about thirty-five. I have two older brothers. I have one younger sister, and I have one younger brother who died as an adult.

AK: And your father was an immigrant at the time that he moved into the house there in Chicago, or he came from an immigrant family?

AV: He came from an immigrant family. His parents emigrated as adults to Philadelphia from Ireland.

AK: And on your mother's side it was something similar?

AV: Well, it was back further. We're not from the *Mayflower* or anything.

[Laughter.] Definitely not. No Anglo-Saxon blood in us at all.

AK: What did your father do? Working in the settlement house--they worked there, or your dad?

AV: First of all, my dad had been raised up to be a priest. He was supposed to be a priest, and he had made it almost all the way through seminary. But he had epileptic seizures and they did not let them finish because epilepsy was not treatable in those days and they thought he couldn't carry out the offices of a priest when he had grand mal

epileptic seizures. So he had left and become a chemist for like a year, but he was very depressed about that, and he wanted to be in some kind of religious life. So that's when he joined the lay ministry at Friendship House.

Basically what they did was they just lived on charity and they had like a storefront, 43rd and Indiana in Chicago, which if you know Chicago, that's like the heart of the African-American Southern immigrant neighborhood, where people come up and work in the factories out there and live in the neighborhoods there. And my parents lived with African-American families. They just would knock on doors, find out someplace to live where somebody would just let them stay. And they worked, but it wasn't for pay. It was all volunteer, charity-type stuff.

AK: So they were supported by the community and they volunteered their services.

AV: Right. And they would also try to get donations from people. They tried to spread it out to the Catholic churches in the suburbs of Chicago, to try to get people to come. People from suburban churches would come to the inner city and work on the weekends, just to get to know African-Americans on a one-to-one basis, instead of fearing them. They also had a farm, I think somewhere in Illinois called Chilterly. They'd take groups of people out into the country, where they would try to do communal living out there, growing vegetables and stuff and bring it back into the city. And get the people out there, work on the farm, and get kids to learn about farm life, because they were about a generation removed from the Southern farms that a lot of these people had emigrated from.

They decided to get married, and that's when they had to leave Friendship House, because they didn't have married couples living there because it was just a problem finding accommodations. These were the 40s. [Laughs.] So after they got married, my dad got a job in Madison, Wisconsin, and they lived there a while, and my oldest brother was born there. They went back to Chicago. My dad was pretty much unemployed. They lived in a tenement with running sewage underneath it. This was before urban renewal. And when my second brother was born, they basically lived on welfare. They moved into a housing project, and my dad did get a job as an orderly in a hospital. And with the help of my grandparents, my mother's parents, they bought a little tiny house out in the suburbs.

They lived out in the suburbs for a few years, where I was born. They did not like living in the suburbs because my mother said it was boring. They were too far away from all their friends. It was too white. And they didn't have a car, so my mother was sort of stranded out there while my dad took the bus back into the city. So when I was four or five years old, they moved back into the city. And we just lived--all seven of us, because all the kids were born by then--we just lived in a two-bedroom walkup apartment on the South Side. I think they were much happier because they were closer to all their friends.

I just grew up with the house just always full of people, just always a pot of coffee on the table and people talking about religion and politics and everything from city politics to civil rights stuff and then later Vietnam War stuff.

AK: And how would you characterize your family's position or positions in these discussions? What were the discussions about?

AV: Well, they were definitely union Democrats, but not white-collar, because both my parents had college educations. It was like an anomaly. They were both extremely educated and extremely intelligent people, but didn't use these things to go out and get money and have a nice house and live in the suburbs and do all the middle class things that people did. They eventually bought an old, burned-down old Victorian house in an all-black neighborhood to rehab and just to live where they felt comfortable.

And we went to a Catholic school for a while. We went to a Catholic church, St. Thomas the Apostle, which in the 1950s and 60s probably was one of the most integrated churches in Chicago, because there were black and white and all kinds of people there, which was different in those days. When the enrollment in the school in the 1960s started becoming more African-American than white, the parish council, which was mostly white, wanted to restrict African-American enrollment, and my father protested. He said, "No. You should take anybody who comes." And there was a big scuffle over that. We were sort of told that we didn't belong in that diocese any more, that we belonged in another diocese called St. Ambrose, which was an all-African-American parish.

And so what happened was that my dad had four kids enrolled in the school, and all of a sudden they told us, "You're in a different diocese. You have to pay out-of-diocese prices." So my dad couldn't afford to send us anymore. So we were kind of shut off, you know. [Laughs.] So we ended up going to public school, which was a big shock to me. Chicago public schools were a huge shock coming from Catholic school. I went to real inner-city schools, probably where there were just a handful of non-African-American kids.

AK: And how old were you when you started going--?

AV: I was going to fifth grade, so I think about eleven.

AK: And what types of things were a shock?

AV: Discipline, unruliness. I went from a classroom where there were fifty kids with one nun where you didn't budge without permission, to a class of maybe twenty-five. I just remember my first teacher in fifth grade, Miss Roberts, with her hair sticking out of her bun and just beside herself trying to control all these kids, kids that were definitely from a much different socio-economic status. [Phone rings.] Just poor clothing. [Phone rings.] Go to the message. Leave a message. [Laughs.]

More one-parent families. Probably more people on welfare, although I wasn't sure about that. Kids that just lived on the other side of the tracks. [Answering machine in background.] The biggest difficulty was for my brothers, who actually graduated from Catholic schools and went from this altar boy thing to a public school where they had a really difficult time adjusting to gangs, drugs. And that was a bigger shock for them.

AK: So then when you finished school, when your parents and your siblings--some of them--were still living in the house, then what was your path?

AV: After I went to high school, I went to University of Illinois at Chicago. I worked almost full-time in grocery stores since I was fifteen. My parents had divorced when I was a senior in college. After I graduated from University of Illinois at Chicago, I just became a waitress. And I had my own apartment and I just didn't have a whole lot of ambition or anything. But in 1982, I decided that I would be a good nurse. This was after I went back to Ireland to visit my Irish relatives. I stayed in Ireland for six months, and it seemed like everyone I met was a nurse, so I got this idea in my head to be a nurse.

So I went back to Chicago and I enrolled in nursing school, and that's the same time I met Pedro Villasana, who was a wetback from Mexico [laughs], who was a cook. In nursing school I worked at a restaurant, just what we would call in Chicago greasy spoon, corner restaurants.

AK: They call them that here too.

AV: You don't have 'em here in Durham. [Laughter.] Just the waitress with the pink apron, and I met the cook that day and his name was Pedro and he was an illegal immigrant from Mexico who had been in the United States for a year and a half.

AK: What year was this?

AV: It was in 1983. And I didn't have a lot of exposure to Hispanics before that. I'd worked with some of them in the grocery store, and I had dated a couple of Mexican guys, and they were all *mojados*, all illegal immigrants working in Chicago in the underground. Some of them worked in the grocery store with me, but very few of them lived in the neighborhood I grew up in. They just went off to their own neighborhoods at night. Pedro lived in the neighborhood. He spoke English. So in that way he was a little bit different from some of the other Mexicans I had known.

So we started going out. And I was having a hard time in nursing school because I was at one of the biggest hospitals in Chicago, and I just saw a whole bunch of trauma and a whole bunch of just stuff that I didn't think I could--. I didn't want to help humanity in that way as a nurse, so that's when the nursing school guidance office helped me take some aptitude tests and decide what I wanted to do. And that's when I heard about occupational therapy. So at the same time Pedro and I were deciding to start our

life together, I was deciding to change careers. I was also learning more about Hispanic culture by going out with him.

I got accepted at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and we decided to move here. We had five hundred dollars. We had a car that a friend of ours donated. And we had the furniture I had from the bedroom I grew up in. And we moved to North Carolina. Talk about culture shock. I mean, I had never been further than like St. Louis, and I consider that the South. So I moved to Chapel Hill and my husband was just--. The only experience he had in the United States was in Chicago, where if he wanted to just be a Mexican, he could just get on a bus and go to a neighborhood and just speak Spanish all day. His cousins lived there. He could stay with them. He could have just maintained all his culture. He could have gone off to all the dance halls, just been a pure Mexican.

But he decided he wanted to know English and he wanted to know more Americans, and that's why he had branched out and why he was living in the neighborhood that I lived in when I met him. Anyway, we moved here kind of blind faith. And my husband had a really hard time because this was 1985, and the only Hispanics here in North Carolina were like *campesinos*, farm workers. We moved to Chapel Hill. I was in a graduate program in occupational therapy, so I was really, really busy, and my husband had never seen anything like this before in his life. All the trees and all the open land and the ruralness of it. He panicked because where was he going to get a job?

So he did get a job in a restaurant. He was still an illegal alien without any papers and we had to do what we had to do to get him a job. And you could not get a can of

jalapeño peppers in Chapel Hill, Durham, or anywhere in the Triangle. Every Saturday, we drove to Benson, North Carolina, to buy tortillas and jalapeño peppers, because the Piggly Wiggly in Benson had an aisle that had all Hispanic food because they had so many farm workers in the area, around, I guess, Johnson County. I can't remember exactly where it was, but we used to go down there and get our supplies so he could have his jalapeños, because you couldn't just get 'em like you can now at Winn Dixie. And there were no Mexican stores.

You just didn't see Hispanics anywhere, except if you went out in the fields and saw them picking tobacco or whatever. And they weren't here except in the growing season. So my husband met some other Hispanics through University of North Carolina graduate students, playing soccer. He was just driving around and he saw where some guys were playing soccer, so he would just hang around. He noticed that some of them looked kind of Hispanic so he sort of tentatively spoke Spanish with them. So he met a couple, two or three graduate students. Only one, this guy named Juvencio--I'll never forget him--he was a graduate student in chemistry from Mexico, and the two of them it was just like molten steel the way they fell into each other. [Laughter.]

Although they were from totally different backgrounds. My husband is from very poor campesino, farm-working background in Mexico. So he played soccer, but I think the first couple years for him were really, really hard. He met some other guys from Spain and Ecuador, but they didn't have the same background as him and didn't have any family or anything.

And in 1986, I was contacted by a social worker from the Raleigh Catholic diocese. I did my master's thesis on Mexican-American farm workers and their

orientation to time. It was kind of off-subject for occupational therapy, but I had done my three-month clinical at UNC hospitals and we had had three or four spinal-cord-injured Hispanics. This was in 1986, and they didn't know what to do with them because these guys were totally foreign to the therapists there and to the nurses and to everything. These guys, to be in a hospital was just like waking up and being dead or something. So with my Spanish and everything, they assigned these guys to me. And then my husband would come and visit them.

José and Juan were the first guys that I worked with over there, and they were both farm workers and they both had been injured on the job. And they were both left without insurance and were both left in UNC hospitals while their crews left. One went to Michigan and one went to Florida, so they had like nobody, because people were not resident here. They were transient through here, farm workers.

So we ended up shipping one guy back to Florida. In fact, I think his wife came to get him and took him in a van, paralyzed, to Florida. And the other guy just went to live with some friends, and his crew just abandoned him and went to Michigan to pick apples. And I was doing my thesis, also, like a year after that. I was interviewing farm workers on their perceptions of time and their orientation to time and how that fit in with health care, attitudes about how you're supposed to get yourself better and you're supposed to have all these goals. And they're based temporally. They're based on tomorrow you do this and the next day you do that. Their time orientation is not the past, the present, and the future, and so I did all kinds of interviews.

And I was looking for a place to interview these Hispanics and at the same time somebody from the Catholic diocese asked if my husband and I were interested in

helping with some legalization assistance. They were looking for bilingual people that knew something about the Hispanic culture and the farm worker culture to help with the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1987, that big amnesty that you heard about. If you could document that you had worked two months in the United States as a farm worker in a two year period--they were real lenient guidelines--you could get your green card, if you had supporting evidence.

And I went to some training for that, and I learned how to fill out some of the paperwork. By the way, the Catholic diocese had been designated by the federal government as an intermediary, someone who could actually help these people get this paperwork done and forward it to the immigration service.

So I went through all kinds of training. I learned all about immigration stuff and all about the new laws, and on the other hand they let me do my master's thesis using some of these immigrants. So my husband and I would go every Sunday to Oxford and Henderson, North Carolina, and interview these people. And that's where we met lots of Hispanics and people that we are still friends with, people that we have become the godparents to their children, and just a big network of Hispanics that we are still friends with.

And that was in 1987. That's also when I first met Father Bruce at Holy Cross Catholic Church. It was from a woman who lived in Durham, a Hispanic woman and her common-law husband, who were filling out immigration papers, and she was pregnant at the time and so I got involved with helping her seek pre-natal care. And I interviewed her husband for my master's thesis, and she was a very staunch Catholic and she kept asking me, "Can't we find somebody that would offer--?"

[Knocking sound. Recorder turned off and on again.]

AV: I guess this woman--her name was Rosa--had actually been going to Holy Cross Catholic church. And the priest there, Father Bruce Babbinger, spoke some Spanish, because I guess--I'm not sure exactly--but he had done some work in Guatemala or Mexico or somewhere. And so it was her idea to start Masses in Spanish. So she asked if I would meet with Father Bruce, with her, and try to start something.

And at that time I was still living in Chapel Hill and I was attending the Newman Center Catholic community over there. And there were American people that were young. Two of them worked out at IBM. One lady was from Burma, and one was an American woman, and then there was another guy named David who spoke some Spanish. And we all came together with Father Bruce in the rectory sometime in 1986 or '87 to talk about offering Spanish or bilingual services or something for the Hispanic community.

AK: And you were more involved in the Newman Center?

AV: Yeah, I was, because I lived in Chapel Hill. The only reason I came to Durham was because I had befriended Rosa and she lived near the church and she lived in a terrible, dilapidated house where the plumbing didn't work and she was afraid. Her neighbors across the street were alcoholics and they would come and borrow money from her. And she was scared and she was pregnant, and she already had a two-year-old boy, and she had some domestic problems with her husband.

So I befriended her, and another woman that was from the Newman Center was working for the literacy council and was actually giving Rosa English lessons. And a couple times, I went over there and subbed for the English lessons. And the English

lessons turned into, "Can you help me call the janitor or the landlord to help fix this door that's falling off the hinges?" So how that's how I also learned about slum landlords in Durham. [Laughs.]

And I also learned about Lincoln Community Health Center, and I think Rosa was probably one of the first Latino women to use the services there. So it was a small community, and I think my husband and I probably knew every Hispanic in Durham at that time, just because there were so few. And we knew a lot of people in the outlying areas.

We moved to Durham in 1990. Actually in 1986 or '87, Father Bruce did start having a bilingual service on Sundays. I think it was once a month, but it was an area-wide thing, because St. Matthew's church up on Mason Road was just getting started, and Immaculate Conception. And so once a month, they'd have it at a different church. But it seemed to me from just going to the churches and seeing what was being offered that they were doing it reluctantly, that they weren't really engaged in this.

The person who was really engaged in this was Father Bruce. I think he had a real affinity for the Hispanic people. I think he had a real affinity for any ethnic person, a minority, a person in need. And what developed at Holy Cross was a Hispanic community that was a part of the church but very separate, because Holy Cross is mostly an African-American church. And it's a mission church, and its mission was to serve the African-American Catholics of Durham as a mission, just as if you'd go to a Third World country and have a mission.

It was to convert. It was to teach. It was to nourish body and soul in the Catholic tradition. And it was run by Jesuits. And so they had a long history behind them, which I

knew about, because I'm very historically curious and I just want to know the roots of it. And I come from a place that didn't have institutionalized segregation, although Chicago still has segregation and racism and everything, but it wasn't institutionalized there. And I grew up where every institution I went to--the public schools, the churches--were integrated.

AK: Unlike the South.

AV: Right. So I knew the history of Holy Cross. I became involved as a catechist, but my interest was always the Hispanic people, because that was a shared background with my husband. And I saw the need there. So I know that we started catechism lessons for the Spanish-speaking kids, and it was separate from the other English-speaking catechism or faith formation, whatever you want to call it.

We also decided to have a community gathering after each Mass once a month at Holy Cross so that people could meet each other and share a meal, because there were so many people that were fragmented and segmented from their families. And so it would be a potluck once a month at the parish hall, and it was still mostly all Hispanic. There were a couple of regular parishioners that might have a Hispanic background or just be interested in it that would come. But it wasn't a mingling of the African-Americans and the Hispanics. It was like two separate entities.

AK: You said at one point that this once-a-month service would alternate among churches, but now it sounds like maybe it switched so that Holy Cross did have the service once a month themselves.

AV: I can't remember when the decision was taken to have a weekly Mass. They had a weekly Sunday Mass that was at four o'clock. And it was probably before 1990

that it became weekly. I can't remember exactly. In addition, I think Father Bruce just had more people knocking on his door, saying, "Hablas Español. ()." "You speak Spanish. Help me." With it being a Catholic church and people spreading the word that Father Bruce spoke Spanish, and so he had people coming to the door. And also I think some of the Catholic social workers would refer people to him.

AK: Once they realized.

AV: Right. So it just sort of started snowballing. At the time, the other Catholic church--. We didn't have the interest that we had from Father Bruce in making it a regular thing or actually establishing a home. I mean, it's one thing to go to church one place every week. It's another thing to be going around from church to church trying to form a community. It just doesn't work that way. People are already migrant. To have to figure out which church to go to on which Sunday--. It was much better that we had one place to go.

At the same time, my husband's actually helped some of his nephews to come here, and his nephews are very skilled musicians. My father-in-law was a traditional guitarist and he had taught it to these nephews. And so they started playing at the church, the traditional church music, Hispanic folk music, and that attracted a lot of people because the music was just beautiful. And it was a place to go for an hour where you hear Spanish, and Spanish is acceptable, and you can come any way you want, in your boots if you've just come out of the fields, and hear the music and even make confession in Spanish to the priest. Just talk to the priest about advice about missing your family or trying not to get drunk on the weekends or all the issues that immigrants have to deal with. It was a place that people identified. I don't think that people ever realized that it

was an African-American mission church. I think that's where some of the problems that came later developed, in that it wasn't ever brought together as one community. There were two separate communities.

Another historical fact is that most Latin American Catholic dioceses and churches--and I know for sure in Mexico--you never go and register as a parishioner. You get baptised in a Catholic church, and you are a member of the universal Catholic church and you can just go anywhere and you're just a member of the church. In the United States, we have this tradition where you have to register as a member. And as the Hispanic population at Holy Cross started getting larger and larger, they still had very few registered members, although to the Hispanics, they would say, "Oh, yeah. That's my church. I'm a Catholic. That's the church I go to." Although their name never showed up on any rolls, and they threw their little crumpled dollar bills in every month, and they supported the church, but it was never anything on paper. So there was like this ghost--.

Plus a lot of people didn't want to give their name because they were still afraid of immigration. They don't want anyone to be able to trace them anywhere. So they didn't want their name in a directory. They didn't want their name down on anything even if they knew that it's the tradition here to register in a parish if you're going to be a participant there.

But it was well known who came. For years and years people came and they never registered in the parish. Father Bruce was scheduled to leave Holy Cross church, I think, in 1995, and a couple of Hispanic parishioners just became distraught because they felt that it was like pulling the rug out from people. Who would keep us going? Who

would minister to people? Could they replace him with somebody who spoke Spanish? On the other hand, there's all the needs of an African-American mission church.

I wasn't involved in that. I wasn't involved in the letter-writing or the talking to the bishop or anything. In fact, I wasn't even really aware that he was scheduled to leave to go to another church until like 1996.

AK: I might need you to backtrack a little. [Laughter.] You put this in the way that you think is best, considering that people will be able to access the information in the archive. And I know that's something to think about for you. But in terms of letter-writing-- More generally, maybe you can tell me at least the timeline.

AV: Well, I've never really thought this out before. It must have been about 1994 or '95 that they were going to reassign Father Bruce. I think Jesuits--I think it's part of their order that they get reassigned about every number of years. People in the parish appealed to the Jesuit order that Father Bruce belonged to and to the diocese of Raleigh to please leave him at Holy Cross and spend some more time to find a more suitable priest who could minister to the needs of African-Americans and Hispanics.

AK: And the letters came from which or both communities?

AV: I only know about the ones that came from the Hispanic community. I'm not sure what the African-American feeling was, whether they wanted him to stay or whether they were all right with him leaving, because I didn't attend English Masses there. I knew a lot of parishioners through my work as a catechist, and I would try to take my children to all the seasonal activities they had, the Kwanzaa celebrations.

Not everybody was happy that Father Bruce was ministering to Hispanics. Some people may have felt--and rightly so--that it was taking time away from the needs of the

African-American surrounding community. And that it was more than the mission of that church was able to accomplish at that time to serve two different groups of people which, because of language and culture, had different needs from a Catholic church.

AK: You said at one point that you felt as though basically there were two separate groups of church-goers. Were there any interactions? Can you think of any times that there were, or that there weren't when there might have been?

AV: Well, when there was a building campaign to build the parish center, we needed to raise money as a church. And I know they did some pledges. I don't think that was asked of the Hispanics, because I don't think there was anybody there that could pledge anything. However, I do remember the Hispanic community decided to hold a meal, and all the women decided to cook food and sell plates of food, and all the money was turned over to the building fund. And that was one time when all the parish participated, because we served the food right after the English-speaking Masses at twelve o'clock.

And people flooded in and they asked all kinds of questions about, "What is this food?" And we had people from Puerto Rico cooking, people from Guatemala, people from Mexico. One family was from Chile. And they just sold their plates of food for five dollars or whatever and all the money just got turned over to the church. And that was a nice experience, because I think the Hispanics felt like they were contributing to the church instead of always being needy and wanting things. Yeah.

I worked very closely with the director of faith formation at Holy Cross, who's a wonderful woman, to try to get classes together where all the kids would be coming at the same time, even though some of the Hispanic kids may still need some classes where

Spanish was spoken, or more bilingual, to feel comfortable. But I remember we worked on having the catechism classes all at the same time so that people would be running into each other more. That started in about 1995.

We started having the First Holy Communion celebration at one Mass, with all the kids, rather than having the English-speaking kids getting their First Communion at nine o'clock and the Spanish-speaking kids at four o'clock. We had a Saturday service, where they all received their First Communion at like a ten o'clock service that there was a little Spanish added in and both languages were sung during the songs. And some of the Hispanic traditions and some of the African--actual African traditions--were woven into that. And those were great times when we could do that, because we worked collaboratively. It was a lot of work because it was doing things differently for everybody. It was like Hispanics were saying, "Well, we do this and this." And African-Americans, "This and this." But there was a give and take on both sides.

AK: So in terms of planning it, there was a real intense collaboration. Is that what you would say?

AV: Yes. The problem is that the adults that need to be there to organize these things for the children, a lot of the Hispanic parents did not speak English. And they didn't come to the meetings and keep up because it was just impossible [laughs], just with their daily tasks, then trying to come to meetings and try to understand everything that's being said in English and only some of it being translated, because there were a few of us that were bilingual, that could be there all the time trying to translate for people. So the language was a big, big issue.

Now the kids, most of them are bilingual. It didn't matter to them, so they were happy to sing a song in Spanish or a song in an African dialect or do an African dance or whatever. And so that's what pulled it all together, plus with a lot of dedication from some of the other catechists that stuck it out and tried to blend the two.

A couple times we had Christmas programs. One year during African-American History Month--that's in February--they invited the Hispanic kids to talk about some Hispanic leaders. And we had a presentation where we got some of the kids together to talk about some of their role models in the Hispanic community as well as African-American leaders. And we did some Christmas programs where we integrated different cultures.

AK: This is sort of an aside. Did you get an idea of what interactions were like for people who were coming to the service where the different aspects--? A Christmas service or a holiday service where you had aspects of Latino and African-American culture integrated, or on these few events, at the meal for the building fund. Did you get an idea? Can you describe what it was like?

AV: It was never really comfortable. There were little comments said and little things done, and I'll give you one example. The piñata is a big tradition in Mexico, and you have kids wielding sticks. And I remember for a Christmas party--where there was a Black Santa Claus and everybody got a present and there was food and it was really great--one mother had donated a piñata filled with candy. One Hispanic mother had gone out of her way to have that. And so we decided to have the breaking of the piñata, and I just remember the reaction from some of the African-American mothers was that it was just irresponsible to have children running around outside trying to hit a piñata with

sticks. They were just afraid that their children would get hurt or get trampled, instead of just realizing that we're going to keep the children safe. We're going to line them up. We're going to make sure the little kids don't get near the big flying sticks. And I just remember feeling--just sinking down when I heard those kind of comments. Why can't we just experience this? Why can't we just try this together?

AK: And when it did work?

AV: The Holy Communion, I think there was a perception that the Hispanic people got carried away and they went overboard doing things. And the girls' dresses had to be too frilly and too big, and it just wasn't our way of doing things. It wasn't our way to do things, you know. Although just some parents had that to say, and I have a feeling that they may have felt like it was just their customs and their African-American Catholic traditions were being just overwhelmed. And I can see that. I can see that. But I don't think it serves any purpose to snipe about it and not come to the surface.

Nothing was ever brought to the surface about, "Well, wait a minute. This concerns me in this way, for my child's development as a--." It wasn't ever brought to the surface. It was all this under-brewing thing.

AK: So would you hear comments?

AV: I would, and it really came to a head for me when Father Bruce--. [Train in background through following section.] Well, actually, one incident happened at Holy Cross church that really upset me. Every year at Holy Cross, we would have a feast of the Virgin of Guadalupe, December 12. And the Virgin of Guadalupe is the patron saint of the Americas, not just of Mexico, although she appeared in Mexico.

AK: Maybe you could explain for somebody who might be listening. I know a little bit about it.

AV: In 1531, in an area near Mexico City, there was an Indian peasant named Juan Diego who was a converted Catholic. He was an Aztec or Nuahtl Indian. I'm not sure if he spoke any Spanish. He spoke Nuahtl, N-U-A-H-T-L. He went to a church. He was a parishioner, and he was interested in converting his other Indian brethren to Catholicism.

One day when his uncle was really sick, he was going to the church to take care of business at the church and then go take care of his uncle. And he was going up on a hill, and he saw an apparition. He saw the Virgin. He saw the Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus, except that she was an Indian, and she spoke to him in his own Indian language. And she said, "Slow down, buddy. I want to talk to you." And he said, "No, no. I can't talk to you. My uncle's sick." And she goes, "No. I want you to go and tell the bishop that you have seen me, that I have appeared to you, and I am the mother of Jesus. You need to go tell him to build a temple here." And he said, "No, no, no, lady. I believe you, but I can't do that."

So he went off, scared, and he went back to tending his uncle, and he was afraid to tell the bishop. I think he did attempt to tell the bishop and the bishop sort of shook him off. So he tried to avoid that hill, but he had to go back over that hill and he saw the Virgin again. And she said, "Don't worry. I'll make it all right. The bishop will understand and will listen to you." And he said, "No, give me a sign." And so she made these roses grow on the hill, and the hill is called Tepeyac. So she made roses grow on the hill, and she had him gather them and put them in his tilma, which we would call a

poncho, a serape. And so he gathered up the roses and put them in there and folded his tilma up like this, and she said, "Take those and show them to the bishop, and that's my sign." Because roses don't grow in December.

So he scurried off and went down to tell the bishop. This was an Indian speaking to a Spaniard, and this must have been extremely difficult for him, but he went back to the bishop again. And he said, "I really have to tell you that the Virgin appeared again and she brought a sign." And the bishop said, "OK, what is it?" So he opened the tilma and the flowers spilled out, and there was the image, exactly as he had seen the Virgin of Guadalupe.

And apparently the bishop believed, and they built the church, the Basilica of the Virgin of Guadalupe on Tepeyac hill, and through that apparition they converted lots of Indians. Because here was a member of their own race personifying herself as the Savior's mother. And the tilma, Juan Diego's tilma, hangs in the basilica, and I guess they've done all sorts of authenticity studies on that, just like they did with the Shroud of Turin.

So her feast day is December 12.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

AV: And the first couple years at Holy Cross, we had a small celebration in a traditional Mexican way. I didn't know much about this myself, but I was learning as I went along. And we'd have a Mass on the Sunday closest to December 12, including a procession around the church, carrying an image of the Virgin and the children offering flowers and singing special songs. One year, we were going to do that, and a group of Mexican women and I wanted to decorate the church, and so we had asked Father Bruce for permission. I think we were going to have the Mass at the regular time on Sunday at four o'clock, and we asked Father Bruce if we could go and look around the church and start putting up some of the decorations or deciding what to do. And he said OK, and we asked if Saturday at four o'clock was a good time and he said yes.

So on Saturday at four o'clock we went into the church, and I had my two young children with me. They were just toddlers at that time, and we went into the church and we were getting the vases out to make sure we had enough vases for the flowers and see where we were going to put the crepe paper and hanging it and everything. And there was a choir practicing in there, and I didn't realize there was going to be a conflict of interest, but we tried to be quiet. My children were running around under the choir loft, and finally the choir director stopped and he just said, "Excuse me!" And I said, "I'm sorry." He goes, "We are trying to practice!" And I said, "I'm sorry, but Father Bruce said we could do this, but if it's bothering you we'll go away and do it another time." He goes, "Your children--your heathen children--are an abomination. They are defiling the sanctuary of God." This is what this man said to me.

AK: The choir director.

AV: Yes. And I said to him, "OK. No problem. We're leaving." [Laughs.] So we locked everything up and we quietly went out. I think there were two other Mexican women with me and my two children. There were other Mexican women in the church building, in the community center, decorating an altar. So I went out there and I was just like "Whoa! You know what?" And there were other choir members just staring down at me who knew me, who knew me. And no one came to my defense, no one said, "You know, Ann-Marie, we're just practicing. Sorry. It seems like there's a conflict." It was this horrible animosity where I could just feel this man's anger coming from way back somewhere where I didn't know about. [Laughs.]

And so I went and I knocked on Father Bruce's door and he came to the door of the rectory and I just burst into tears. I said, "Father, there's a man in there and he's just saying terrible things about my children, and he just spoke to me in a way that I just can't believe someone would speak to me in a church." And I said, "Didn't you tell me we could go inside that church and help decorate." He goes, "Yes. Now I see that it was my mistake. The choir's practicing and I forgot to tell you that and this was all my mistake. I'll talk to that man. And don't worry, it's not about you. He's got some other problems."

So I was really upset. So I went back into the building and started putting the flowers back on the little altar inside the church hall, and I just decided I had to go back and talk to that man. I had to make it right with that man. I had to tell him who I was and apologize to him. So I went back out to go to the church because I thought the choir practice would be over. And he's walking across the parking lot, so I walked up to him and I put my hand out and I said, "My name is Ann-Marie Villasana, and I want to just say that I'm sorry about the altercation in the church." And he just started yelling at me.

"I don't care who you are! Who do you think you are! You have no right coming in that church with those children. Ra ra ra ra ra!"

And then I really lost it, and I ran into the church. And then the guy comes ringing the doorbell, and I was in there and I heard him. The choir director was like, "Father Bruce, I've got to talk to you about this woman!" And he just said, "No, you don't. It was my fault. She had permission to be in that church. You don't need to speak to her ever again. I don't ever want to hear you speaking of her again. She and her children are valued members of this community. Her children did not misbehave. Her children are not defiling anything. If you have a problem, it was--."

So then he decided he was going to resign from being the choir director, and all this craziness happened. And I think there was way more to it than what I saw. I think everything had come to a head, that the Virgin of Guadalupe celebration was going to be more important than other things going on in the parish. And it came about that people told me that Father Bruce was protecting me, protecting Hispanic people, favoring the Hispanic people, catering to the Hispanic people. It just came to a head after that.

Father Bruce finally was reassigned. Before he left, he asked me if I would please serve on a self-study committee to build a new church, as a representative of the Hispanic people. And I would do anything for Father Bruce, so I said yes. And the first meeting we had, Father Bruce was there, so I could feel animosity at that meeting, lots of animosity at that meeting, as I even introduced myself. And in subsequent meetings, it just became clear to me that there was just a lot of animosity towards me personally and towards the Hispanic community.

I wasn't sure exactly where it came from, what had transpired before, what was going on. But it came up in one of the meetings. They kept saying, "There are only ten registered Hispanic families in this parish. How can you keep justifying all this interest and energy to the Hispanics when there are only ten registered?" That's when I said, "You know, they don't know to register. If you want them registered, we'll get them registered."

So another parishioner and I registered over a hundred families in a couple weeks, and I think that's the tip of the iceberg. I didn't realize that I was stepping in the mess, so to say. I thought, "Oh, well let's register them. They don't realize. We will ask them, 'If you want to consider yourself a member of this church, if you've been coming, if you've been participating and contributing to the church, worshipping at the church, please register. Your name doesn't have to go into a directory, but you will receive the mailings. You will receive an envelope to give your *ofrenda*, your *limosna*, your weekly offering. And so lots of people signed up and did it. And I think that they thought that that was my battle cry or something, when it wasn't in any way. It was OK, we'll be good parishioners. We will sign up.

A few years earlier, Father Bruce had brought a proposition before the Hispanic community to change the Mass to one o'clock. He didn't give a background of why, but he just presented it. He just said the parish council was thinking one o'clock would be a better time. What do you all think? And everybody voted it down, because people said, "One o'clock we're doing our laundry. One o'clock we're at the Food Lion shopping. One o'clock we're getting off of work. Four o'clock is better for us. We like four o'clock better because a lot of us work. A lot of us Sunday is our only day off and we have to go

to the mall and do these things and the mall closes at five. So we have to get this done during the day. We have to do all this stuff, so four o'clock would be better."

So I remember that got voted down, and the musicians could only play at that time because they had their jobs to do and they had other things to do and that's the time they could come play. Well, that resurfaced, I guess it was 1996, after we had registered everyone and after I had worked really hard with the director of faith formation and some really wonderful catechists to try to integrate all the religious-- And a new priest came, the new priest came.

AK: While Father Bruce was still there?

AV: Well, no, he didn't really get to orient him much at all. There was another priest who was also there helping. His name was Father Virgil and he spoke fluent Spanish. And the congregation didn't really know his background, but he started coming and helping Father Bruce with the Masses. And I didn't know anything about him, except I knew that he was very conservative he very much wanted services all in Spanish instead of bilingual, which I opposed, because then anyone who spoke English would feel very unwelcome there at that Mass.

So there were all these things going on that I didn't know all the inner workings. I was not on the parish council. I didn't go to any of the meetings or anything. There was one Hispanic member of the parish council who when Father Bruce left, she stopped going to the parish council meetings because she felt intimidated and afraid. She didn't say that to a lot of people, but she said that to me. So she stopped going, so therefore the excuse was, "Well, your representative doesn't even come to parish council meetings, so how are we supposed to communicate with the Hispanics." And the priest that came said

that he could say the Mass in Spanish, but we had problems with confessions and things like that, and that's why the other priest, Father Virgil Miller, who spoke Spanish, was supposed to help out in that capacity.

AK: So by now, Father Bruce was completely gone.

AV: Father Bruce left in July.

AK: And Father Virgil was there most of the time?

AV: No, Father Virgil just came for the Sunday Masses. He wasn't involved in any of the regular parish activities, which I think was a mistake, because he was seen just as this special priest who'd come for this special Hispanic thing. He wasn't interwoven with the parish, and I can see how that wouldn't work at all.

AK: The competition?

AV: Yes, and also this guy really advocated only Spanish. And I think at this point there was so much animosity that people thought that people were getting up there and saying things in Spanish that no one understood that were trying to undermine African-American interests. [Laughs.] It's just mind-boggling.

AK: How come then that the services--?

AV: OK. Well, one day I went to a catechist training meeting. I attended all of those. My friend Maria Torres, who was another catechist and a member of the parish council was there. We were going through a catechist training thing. It was during Hurricane Fran. I think it was about the same time. That's how I relate it. A member of the parish council came up to me during the meeting and said, "Ann-Marie, can I talk to you?" His name was Carl Pickney. He said, "Can I talk to you right now?" He said, "Father David"--that was the new priest, Father David Berry--"wants to speak to you."

I said, "OK." I asked the head catechist if I could leave and they said yes, so we went outside and Carl Pickney, he said, "The parish council has come to a decision. Because you and Maria are the spokespeople for the Hispanics--." Now, that was the first time. I had never called myself a spokesperson for the Hispanics. I mean, I was a member of the parish. In all facilities, I'd never presented myself as a spokesperson for anybody except that I'm outspoken. [Laughter.] He was very nice to me. He said, "This is a decision that's been come to. The powers that be just did this. We maybe not all agree to this, but we're going to follow through with this." He said, "All Masses are going to be said in English. The bilingual Mass is going to be switched to one o'clock, and it's going to be all in English, and the only priest who is going to say Masses in this parish is going to be Father David Berry."

I just went, "When are we going to discuss this?" He said, "It's been discussed. It's been voted."

AK: And you hadn't been there, the two representatives.

AV: So if I'm a representative, when did I ever hear about this? I said, "Have you contacted the choir? Can the choir come and play at one o'clock? Is the choir supposed to sing English music now? If we're all in English, do we not sing in English any more?" I said, "Carl, this doesn't make any sense. Think of the logistics." He goes, "Well, no, December 1st this is going to happen." Mind you, this was like September or October. It was like eight Sundays hence.

I was just floored, because I thought things were moving in a better direction with more people signed up, more Hispanic parents running into American parents in the parking lot bringing their kids. Even if they went to Mass at four, they still brought the

kids to faith formation at ten-thirty or something. And he gave me a letter. He gave me a statement from the parish council that had decided in order to preserve the African-American traditions upon which Holy Cross was founded, that in trying to achieve unity, the Mass would be moved to one o'clock, all Masses would be said in English, and only Father Berry or his designate would offer Mass.

I never met with Father Berry about this. Carl never took me to Father Berry. It was like an ambush or something. It was outside the church, here's the paper, and he also said, "You and Maria are going to present this on Sunday." And I said, "No, I'm not presenting this to anybody on Sunday. This is for the parish council to present to the Hispanics." So I left. I think I had to go home to my children or something, and I was just totally distraught.

That evening I got a call from Maria Torres. She had received the exact same letter, from Father Berry though, or from somebody. Somebody had been speaking to her at the same time they were speaking to me. And she had been told that they wanted her to read this during the Mass in English and Spanish, and she absolutely said no. She said, "Absolutely no. I will not read this to you and as a matter of fact, I'm not going to speak to you. I am leaving right now."

She got in her car, she drove home, she crashed her car. That's how upset she was. Maria crashed her car because she was beside herself with this, with the way it was presented to us. No discussion. And they said, "You could have been there. You're on the parish council. You could have been at the meetings. You could have heard about this." That's the way it was presented to her, the way she told me. I don't know how they say they presented it to her.

And I can't say "they." I've been accused of racism when I say "they" and "you."
[Laughs.] So Maria and I of course got together, and we tried to talk to Father David Berry. He wouldn't answer the telephone. We kept calling and calling. He wouldn't answer the telephone. So I just went to the diocese of Raleigh with it. I called the diocese of Raleigh and I talked to the Hispanic liaison, I can't remember her name. I faxed a copy of this thing to them so they could see what it was about. I left messages with all sorts of people to call me back. No one ever contacted me. No one ever called me. It was like, boom, this is it.

And the choir knew nothing about this, the parishioners knew nothing about this, the eucharistic ministers, the lectors. Nobody that was involved in this had been informed of this at all. And I didn't try to reach any of the parish council members, because to talk about what?

AK: So you had been to their meetings?

AV: No!

AK: Or you would have except that--?

AV: Maria would have. I'm not sure. I'm not sure how that was. I was not a member of the parish council, so I have no idea how this--. I was on the self-study committee, and I think all this stuff was in the works, but nothing was ever mentioned to me. There were just a whole bunch of snide remarks made. They would make jokes. They would say things to me like, "Oh, don't worry about how many Hispanic-Americans. We've got to find an Asian-American, a Filipino-American, a Nigerian-American, and we're going to mix it all up." Just totally forgetting the fact that there might have been a handful of each one of these contingents, but there weren't a hundred

and twenty-five of these. Holy Cross is a small parish. When you've got a hundred and twenty-five parishioners who speak one language, it's a presence.

I had done what I thought I could do as a catechist to make people understand the history of Holy Cross church. I remember having a parent meeting for the First Communion kids and saying to the parents, explaining to them how back in segregation days, black people could not walk into a Catholic church so that they could understand about segregation. But they're uneducated immigrants who don't know the history of the United States. They're not educated people that just know all this stuff. And I would just try to introduce it to them. But I never heard anyone else try to do that, try to make an effort of saying, "This is where this church comes from. This is the wonderfulness, the roots of this place. This is the uniqueness of this place. This is how it came about. This is why these people are proud of their church. This is why the whole community is proud of Holy Cross and this is why they want the children to do an African welcome dance during the First Communion. This is their culture. This is why they have a certain color altar cloths and stuff like that."

So I feel good in myself that I tried to present that to the Hispanics as a catechist and other things. I think they saw, when some other women and I went to start the faith formation classes in Spanish, or bilingually, that we just wanted our own little program. And I can see that I could have done more work on that. But there were there some kids who were ten and twelve years old who didn't speak any English, who would not have come unless there was that link of the language.

AK: So then after this whole scene happened and you all made a big attempt to talk to the powers that be in Raleigh and all that, then what happened?

AV: There was a tug of war between who was going to announce this at the four o'clock bilingual Mass. The changes were announced to all the other Masses on a certain Sunday. But on that Sunday they were not announced to the four o'clock Mass, which I thought was terribly dividing of the community, because believe you me there were plenty of whites, blacks, Filipinos, and everyone else who didn't know what they were talking about when it was announced. They were just as flabbergasted as I was about why this was happening. But you see the Hispanic community was not told about it because Maria Torres refused to state it, refused to go up there and read it. And I guess the priest didn't want to read it. Nobody wanted to say anything. They wanted us to do it, and we refused to do it.

And so I remember the day we were supposed to say it, I went to the sacristy and Father Berry was there and I said, "How can you expect us to read this? Can't we have some kind of discussion? Can't we have a community meeting? Can't we get some of this out on the table?" He said, "Well, this is just going to unify the parish. You're welcome to speak any language you want." It was this amorphous, "Speak Spanish all you want! Sing any songs you want in Spanish! I'm going to conduct the Mass in English. You can answer in Spanish." That was how they presented it.

I said, "I can't believe, Father Berry, that this is happening." I said, "Somebody better make an announcement about this." Well, nothing was announced, and I was angry. I had an angry confrontation with him that that was true. I don't think Maria even came to church ever again after that. She just stopped coming. I just kept going. [Laughs.] And every time I would speak Spanish with somebody, there would be an Anglo or an African-American who would sidle up to make me feel like I had no right to

speak Spanish, that I was hiding something from somebody by speaking Spanish. That whole prevailing attitude was, "They speak English. They're just speaking Spanish so we don't understand what they're saying."

That was the attitude I got during some Sunday mornings as the kids were arriving for catechism. They would be speaking Spanish and I heard several of the teachers say, "When you come here, you speak English." The priest walked into my class and some of the kids said, "Hola! Hola! Comos da?" And he said, "No, speak English here. You have got to learn English." And I just find that totally unacceptable in a Catholic church, where there's been a mandate from the Vatican that whenever possible, native languages are supposed to be spoken. That, no. [Laughs.]

There was also some controversy over whether Father Berry spoke Spanish or not. I'm not sure he spoke Spanish. I think he understood more Spanish than he let people onto, but he also was overwhelmed with the responsibilities of this parish. He was just unequipped. I don't think anyone would be equipped to walk in and handle all this stuff, so I don't fault him for anything he did. It was hard.

It didn't get announced that Sunday. The following Sunday, I remember going to Father David like half an hour before the Mass and saying, "Father David, before this is announced, can I say something?" He said, "What are you going to say?" I said, "I don't know what I'm going to say. I'm going to say, 'Everybody meet after church and let's talk about this or something and try to get some consensus that we can present as a group back to--.'" I said, "I don't know what I'm going to say." He said, "Ann-Marie, you can say anything you want to say. I'm just tired of this. I don't care what you say."

Now, at that time, announcements were made during the middle of the Mass. They weren't made at the end of Mass. They were being made after the homily. That's when they made announcements. Most churches make announcements before Mass or after Mass, but announcements were right after the homily. So Father Berry had said I could speak. I'm not sure about it, but I think that's the Mass where he announced. Yeah, that was it. They changed it from the decree that they read to the English-speaking people. They changed it so that all the words he was saying were not from the paper that he had read to the other people. He had watered it down or done something to it.

I'm sitting there going, "I can't believe this is happening." I said, "I'll just see how many people understand what's going on and how many people want to stay for our meeting." So after so many announcements were read, there was a little Hispanic girl who was going to have her First Communion during that Mass. So he finished the announcements and he said, "OK." The little girl's name was Gabriela. "Come forward." And I just raised my hand and I said, "Didn't you tell me I could speak, Father Berry?" And he goes, "No! No more announcements. There are no more announcements!"

And I just lost it. I just stood up and I said in Spanish, "Does anybody in this church understand what the priest just announced, that there are going to be no more Masses in Spanish?" And then just bedlam broke out. And somebody stood up and said, "Can't you wait until the Mass is over before you start doing this?" This is all in Spanish. Some guy turned around to me and said, "Why are you saying that to the priest? He's a priest. Have respect for him." Someone else got up and said, "He's not a priest. No priest would do this."

We had some other problems with Father Berry in that he wouldn't stay after Mass to talk to any of the Hispanic people. He wouldn't for the English-speaking people either. He made fun of people that were asking him for help. I felt bad for him, because it was way overwhelming for him, but I think the way he reacted was he just escaped. He just ran away from it. Even though we were there to help him. We offered over and over again to translate things, to do all kinds of things, Maria and I did. We went overboard to tell him we were there to do that.

So bedlam broke loose and I said, "I just want to know how many people understand." And people just started shouting and the man in the choir said, "Everybody calm down and just sit down. We'll discuss this after Mass." And a woman got up and took the Virgin of Guadalupe and walked out of the church. And I walked out of the church. We had raised money to buy a statue of the Virgin of Guadalupe that was put away in storage and only brought out at the four o'clock Mass. So it wasn't like she was part of the church. It was like this was just something we had.

AK: She didn't stay out.

AV: She didn't stay out. Well, there's rules about how many statues you can have in a church, so I understand that. But unless we went and got her and put her out, she wasn't out there.

And so we just went out, and Maria Torres came out just crying, crying, and just sobbing. And people came out and there was just bedlam going on. The Mass went on. So there was a division right there. And unfortunately there were newspaper reporters there.

AK: They had heard about it.

AV: Well, no. Everyone said that I called them. Everyone said, "Well Ann-Marie Villasana called them because she's the only one that knew about that paper, about the announcement, and she's the one that asked." I had my ideas of who called the press, and I called this person and said, "Anything else about Holy Cross that comes out, anything that you're the only person privy to comes out in print, I'll know that you're the one that called the reporters. You think you're doing this to help the parish, but you're not." And so nothing else came out after that, so I'm pretty sure I know who that person is who called the--.

But it was still pinned on me. I was the one. Then the picture came out in the newspaper of a lady carrying the Virgin outside the church and then everyone said that was me carrying the Virgin. And then the big thing was, "Ann-Marie walked out with the Virgin" and this whole big thing happened that I became this big--. And the African-American community was all outraged, and I had to come and apologize to them for disrupting a sacred Mass and lying and calling the press, and it was just this horrible ugly thing. And because I knew that I hadn't called the press, and because I knew that I hadn't staged anything, that I had just been trying to bring--.

Well, anyway, we met outside and we decided that we were the next day just going to go down to the diocese and just talk to the bishop or whoever would talk to us. So we got whoever wanted to come just showed up the next day and we went down to the diocese and we talked to the vicar, actually. And it was all discombobulated, and by the time we got down to the diocese at ten o'clock [laughs], Father Berry was already sitting there, so he had already spoken to the bishop, and he goes, "How did your little event turn out yesterday?" or something. It was like an event that I had staged.

I said, "Well, Father Berry, we've got some things to work out. There's no event going on. There's some things that need to be talked about and that's what I'm here for." And Father Berry pulled me to the side at the Catholic diocese of Raleigh and said, "Ann-Marie, I really admire what you're doing." So I don't know if he felt like his hands were tied or he was just trying to bait me. I had no idea at this point. It was so political and such a mess at that point. But I kept going back to the Mass, the bilingual Mass, dropped off people who were afraid to go. I heard rumors from parishioners that they were going to call immigration in to round everyone up and send them off, so people were afraid to come to the church. It just sparked a whole big media frenzy thing. There were all sorts of misquotes, and reporters calling and people calling me up all the time, and just craziness.

And I just kept going to the Mass. I was there if anybody wanted to talk to me or ask me why I did what I did. And I was right there, going every Sunday, and I would go and teach my catechism class, and they started sending people to sit in on my catechism class. Every Sunday, there'd be another person sitting there, which was fine, but why? You know? So it just got where I just kept going out of just--. This is my church. This is where I belong. This is where my kids come to Sunday school. This is where I had friendships. But very uncomfortable, very few people speaking to me. Some people calling me up just to find out what was going on because nobody understood this. They didn't know why the parish council had made this decision. They didn't know why it was in the newspaper. They didn't know what was said.

AK: And so what was happening to the Latino community in these weeks following?

AV: Total confusion. Well, see, we were having our rosaries for the Virgin of Guadalupe. It's the tradition in Mexico to say rosaries. There's a period of time before the feast of the Virgin of Guadalupe. It's about eight or nine weeks, where people traditionally say a special rosary in anticipation of celebrating the feast day. And the way we do it in the Hispanic community was every Saturday we'd go to a different person's house and we'd pray the rosary and we'd have a communal meal.

And so that was where we'd all meet and where everyone started talking about this. And a lot of people just said, "We're just not going back there. It's too risky. We don't care. We know now where we stand." And some people went immediately to Roxboro, to a Catholic church in Roxboro, people that live in that direction. So a faction went up there. Some people started going to the earlier Masses. Some people decided it's a good thing. I'll learn more English. I'll go to the English Masses. They stuck with the parish.

As soon as I decided to not go to that church any more, when they went through with this, even though the bishop said that they needed to reinstate it. Plus we had these meetings with the bishop and the Hispanic community and the American community, and some other things were said to me. And I stood up and apologized in all sincerity and people laughed at me and said, "Yeah, you're apologizing, but you don't mean it." One parish council member came and shook my hand and said, "I forgive you. I understand where you're coming from." One person. The rest of it was just blown over. They were going to go on their way.

No attempt at any kind of reconciliation. No attempt at any kind of understanding of the underlying issues or reconciliation of anything. And so people stopped going.

There wasn't a priest to hear their confessions. There wasn't a priest to baptize people. Apparently there were some baptisms and some other sacraments that were done that the people felt very disappointed and that they weren't receiving Catholic sacraments, that the words were just being said. And they felt alienated.

So I stopped teaching, and the faith formation director said, "What am I going to do with these kids?" I said, "Most of them speak English. They'll just come and you'll just put them in the other classes. I'm sorry. I'm too uncomfortable. I just can't come and do this. I need to separate from this. Just my presence here makes everyone uncomfortable, so I'm just going to withdraw." [Laughs.] And she did call me a few times. Then she felt like I was sticking her with all these Hispanic kids and she wanted to do the best by them, but she didn't know. So I felt really bad for her, the faith formation director, because she had always been very sincere and really trying to do what she could to understand and to bring faith formation for all the kids of the parish.

There were several other people that called me with support, but--.

AK: Be sure to let me know when you have to--.

AV: What time is it?

AK: It's about twelve till.

AV: To six? I have to go because they'll charge me money if I don't get my children. [Laughter.]

END OF INTERVIEW