Published in final edited form as:

NAPA Bull. 2009 May ; 31(1): 47–63. doi:10.1111/j.1556-4797.2009.01018.x.

Juramentos and Mandas: Traditional Catholic Practices and Substance Abuse in Mexican Communities of Southeastern Pennsylvania

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“Ask in my name and you shall receive.”

John 17:23–24

Religious beliefs of migrants and immigrants and their introduction into mainstream U.S. religious institutions are not often a focus of research on the Mexican diaspora to the United States. Notable exceptions are found in the works of Reese (2001), Hagan and Ebaugh (2003), and Odem (2004). This dearth exists despite a growing number of studies on religion and migration/immigration in general (e.g., Bowen, 2004; Levitt, 1988). This article focuses on the manner in which Mexican sojourners use their traditional religious beliefs and practices in the United States to deal with and overcome substance abuse and other health problems.ⁱ We first became interested in their traditional religious practices while conducting alcohol abuse research in southeastern Pennsylvania.ⁱⁱ In particular, the use of *juramentos* (ritual promises) by Mexican immigrants and migrants to abstain from drinking caught our interest.ⁱⁱⁱ Later, while teaching an ethnographic field school in Mexican sending communities, we discovered that migrants' wives and mothers made *mandas* (requests/pleas) to specific saints on their behalf. As we made further inquiries into these religious practices in Pennsylvania and Mexico, we learned that *juramentos* and *mandas* are common practices among Mexican migrants and immigrants.

In this article, we address the use of Mexican folk Catholicism in the Misión Santa María, Madre de Dios, a Catholic mission established to reach out to the dispersed Mexican population in southeastern Pennsylvania. The emphasis will be on the manner in which many of its members, mainly migrants and immigrants, draw on *juramentos* to abstain from alcohol abuse. The use of *mandas* by family members who remain in Mexico to obtain divine intervention in the drinking problems of kin in Pennsylvania will also be included. The article is divided into three general parts. In the first section, we present the relationship between Mexican migration and immigration and the introduction of Mexican folk

ⁱThis article is based on a paper, by the same title, prepared for the Conference on Mexicanos in Greater Aztlan: From the Pacific Northwest to the New South, sponsored by the Julian Samora Research Institute, Michigan State University, on November 2005.

ⁱⁱThe study, “Problem Drinking among Migrant Mexican Farmworkers”, was funded by the National Institute Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism Grant # 1R03 AA12659-01.

ⁱⁱⁱImmigrants are individuals who left their homeland in Mexico and now reside and work in the United States permanently. They uprooted themselves and their families from Mexico and transplanted themselves in the United States. Migrants are individuals whose home base remains in Mexico but who work in the United States temporarily. Their stay in the United States may be for a few months or a few years but it is not permanent.

Catholicism in Southern Chester County. This discussion sets the background. The nature of alcohol abuse among the Mexican-origin population is outlined briefly in the second part.^{iv} In the third and last part, we define and describe *mandas* and *juramentos*, and discuss the manner in which *juramentos* in particular are practiced in Southern Chester County. In this section we explore who makes *mandas* and *juramentos*, why they do so, and how the two practices deter substance abuse.

Mexican Immigration, Migration, and the Catholic Church in Southern Chester County, Pennsylvania

Southern Chester County, a major mushroom producing region of the country, covers the lower one-third of the county. Small boroughs and townships, all with under 6,000 inhabitants, set this semi-rural area apart from the remainder of the county. The Mexican-origin population in this region is relatively new, as has been documented in earlier works (Garcia, 1997; 1998a, 1998b; 2002). Mexican migrant workers started to arrive in the 1970s without their families, but their numbers did not increase until the late 1980s (Garcia, 1997). They are the most recent of a succession of ethnic groups recruited to work in the mushroom industry as harvesters (Garcia, 1997; Machuca, 2004). The majority of migrants in the 1990s were from the states of Guanajuato and Toluca in Mexico (Garcia & Gonzalez, 1995). As migrants from these states immigrated with their families and abandoned mushroom work for employment in other local industries, compatriots from the states of Michoacán and Guerrero filled the openings (Garcia, 2002). These workers, like their *guanajuatense* (natives of Guanajuato) counterparts, have established their own migration networks that link kinsmen and friends in Mexico to jobs in the mushroom industry (García, 1997). Because workers learn of mushroom work through these networks, transnational migrants simultaneously employed in the industry tend to come from specific regions of Mexico.

Initially, the migrants lived in labor camps, or *campos*, as the workers refer to them in the Spanish, hidden away from the boroughs and townships (Garcia & Gonzalez, 1995; Garcia, 1997). Today, as before, these camps are situated on property belonging to the mushroom growers, near mushroom production units. Starting in the late 1980s, as a result of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986, migrants began to settle with their families in Kennett Square and other communities situated along Route 1 and Route 41.^v According to Census 2000, the “Hispanic” population (Mexicans and non-Mexicans) in Southern Chester County increased from 3,728 in 1990 to 8,452 in 2000. This increase is evident in the communities of Kennett Square and Toughkenamon. In absolute numbers, as Table 1 (Ethnic Population Size in Kennett Square, Pennsylvania, 1990 and 2000) shows, the Mexican-origin population rose from 662 (12.6% of the total population) in 1990 to 1,470 (27.9%) residents in 2000, an increase of 120 percent. Located about one mile west of Kennett Square, on Old Baltimore Pike, or Route One, is the unincorporated community of Toughkenamon. As demonstrated in Table 2: Ethnic Population Size in Toughkenamon, Pennsylvania, 1990 and 2000, the Mexican-origin population increased from 500 (39.28% of the total population) in 1990 to 665 (48.4%) in 2000, an increase of 33 percent. In this

^{iv}The term “Mexican-origin” is used in this report to identify Mexican citizens—migrants and immigrants—and American citizens of Mexican descent.

^vBasically, IRCA was to halt, the growing “illegal” immigration problem of the United States by legalizing undocumented workers residing in the country, deterring others from entering illegally by penalizing employers who hire workers without proper immigration documents or inspection. Specifically, the Special Agricultural Workers (SAW) Program, a major legalization program of IRCA, was to legalize the undocumented labor force employed in agriculture. It would allow illegal, or undocumented, farm workers, to legalize their status in the country, if they met stipulated criteria.

The Special Agricultural Workers Program (SAW) was a legalization program of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA). It was implemented to legalize illegal immigrant and migrant farmworkers who could demonstrate that they had performed at least 90 days of agricultural labor in the United States in the years preceding the enactment of IRCA.

community, the Mexican-origin population is now the ethnic majority. In these and other communities in the region, the Mexican-origin population is no longer concentrated in specific neighborhoods. They now are spreading out and mortgaging or renting homes where they can afford to do so. Some of the more fortunate are also opening businesses, and about a dozen of them are growing mushrooms.

The vast majority of Mexican migrants and immigrants were Catholic in their homeland and remain Catholic in Southern Chester County (Machuca, 2004). However, some of them have converted to other denominations, especially Pentecostal or Baptist (Monsignor Frank Depman, personal communication, November, 2005). Catholicism is not new to the region. In fact, the presence of the Roman Catholic Church in Southern Chester County has been documented as early as the mid-1860s (Machuca, 2004). Since then, waves of immigrants, among them Irish, Italians, and Puerto Ricans, have contributed to its presence (Machuca, 2004). Puerto Ricans migrated into the region in the 1940s and became the majority in the mushroom labor force in the 1950s and 1960s (Machuca, 2004, García, 1997). They registered at, participated in, and, over time, assimilated into existing parishes prior to the arrival of the Mexicans (Machuca, 2004; Monsignor Frank Depman, personal communication, December, 2005).

Early on, despite the availability of Spanish-language masses aimed at the Puerto Rican population in some of the parishes, Mexican sojourners did not attend mass on a regular basis in any of the five parishes, nor did they participate in any of the other religious activities, such as Bible study and theology classes for adults, home rosaries, and planning meetings (Machuca, 2004). The migrants' lack of participation was mainly due to their living arrangements and the jurisdictional setup of the parishes (Machuca, 2004). The migrants lived in labor camps far from the churches in local communities, which they could not attend because of the lack of public transportation. Aware of the increase in the migrant population and their lack of participation in the church, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia initiated a special outreach effort to meet the pastoral needs of this relatively isolated population in 1980 (Machuca, 2004). The Archdiocese was also responding to demands by some of the ex-migrants who were beginning to settle down in the region. An example of this demand was the holding of special mass for Our Lady of Guadalupe (Luis Tlaseca, personal communication, December, 2005). Father Charles Kennedy, a Spanish-speaking Irish American priest was assigned to work full time with the migrants and other Spanish-speaking groups (Machuca, 2004). Father Kennedy began to hold Spanish-language masses in and near the mushroom camps in several parishes in the early 1980s (Machuca, 2004). He also started the local tradition of holding a special mass for of Our Lady of Guadalupe on her feast day. Despite his success in reaching out to this congregation, Father Kennedy lamented not meeting their health, work, housing and transportation needs (Machuca, 2004).

Starting in the late 1980s, as Mexican migrants began to settle with their families and surpass their Puerto Rican counterparts in population size, their spiritual and non-pastoral needs increased. However, these needs were not being met by the local parishes. In 1992, under the directorship of Father Frank Depman (now Monsignor Frank Depman), La Misión Santa María, Madre de Dios (henceforth referred to as Misión Santa María) was established in the Avondale Center, a small shopping center on Route 41, in order to meet the needs of the local Mexican-origin community. Today, it still provides an array of services to the growing Mexican population. Religious services, such as arranging masses, baptisms, weddings, and ministry to the sick, are the most important activities for the Misión Santa María (Machuca, 2004). Social services are also offered. They consist of transportation to masses, doctor appointments, and other events, distribution of donated clothes, furniture, and food, and translation and interpretation, and a number of other types of assistance (Machuca, 2004). These services also include partnerships with the Mexican Consulate in

Philadelphia and the sponsoring of cultural activities, such as *Danza Tenochtli* and *Kermeses* (Machuca, 2004).

The Misión Santa María encompasses all five parishes that comprise Southern Chester County and has a registered membership of 9,513 individuals (Monsignor Frank Depman, personal communication, December, 2005).^{vi} It does not fall under the jurisdiction of any of the parishes, but is attached to Assumption B.V.M parish in West Grove and only accountable to the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. The Misión Santa María does not have its own church or rectory. Hence, its members attend Spanish language masses primarily offered by Monsignor Frank Depman in parish churches near them, such as St. Patrick in Kennett Square, Assumption B.V.M in West Grove, and Sacred Heart in Oxford. Mexican devotees only attend Spanish language mass in these churches and do not participate in the other activities of the parishes. In fact, to date, there are less than a dozen Mexicans registered in the five parishes (Monsignor Frank Depman, personal communication, December, 2005). They only see themselves as visitors in these churches and do not feel part of the English-speaking non-Latino congregations. Given the cultural divide between the Mexican and non-Mexican populations in the region, Mexican residents feel more at home in the Misión Santa María and participate in a number of its religious activities which are offered in Spanish, among them, Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Baptism and other sacramental orientation, as well as other religions education.

Gradually, the Mexican-origin population has introduced its traditional Catholic beliefs and practices to this region, and the Misión Santa María has embraced and incorporated them. Their Catholicism can be considered a form of folk Catholicism, a variety of Catholicism deviating from Roman Catholic Church doctrine as practiced in the United States (Anonymous, 2001–2005). For example, Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe (Our Lady of Guadalupe), the patron saint of Mexico and the Americas, is more revered than the Virgin Mary or for that matter Nuestra Señora de la Providencia (Our Lady of the Providence), the patron saint of Puerto Rico. On the feast day of Our Lady of Guadalupe, December 12, mass is held at Assumption B.V.M Church in West Grove. In 2005, two masses were offered in order to accommodate the growing Mexican population. This year alone, 2,500 devotees attended both masses (Monsignor Frank Depman, personal communication, December, 2005). Our Lady of Guadalupe is also the patron saint of the Misión Santa María, and her devotees often pray at her altar there instead of traveling to one of the parish churches. Additionally, altars that include Our Lady of Guadalupe and other saints are found in homes and at work sites much like in Mexico (Anderton, 2004). Rituals involving these saints, such as *juramentos* and *mandas*, the focus of this article, are also practiced by the local Mexican population. The two practices, especially *juramentos*, are performed at the Misión Santa María and are not looked down upon as archaic folk beliefs. Another practice associated with Mexican folk Catholicism is the use of *milagros*, or miracles. *Milagros* are small religious charms, believed to be endowed with spiritual powers for healing and for helping to restore and preserve well-being and balance in the lives of devotees or the lives of those for whom they pray.

Mexican Transnational Migrants and Alcohol Abuse

The use of *mandas* and *juramentos* among the Mexican-origin population was observed while conducting alcohol research among transnational Mexican migrants in Southern Chester County (see García, 2008 for details regarding the study). These migrants harvest

^{vi}The membership (9,513) surpasses the total number of enumerated Hispanics in Southern Chester County in Census 2000 (8,452). The difference may be due to a combination of population growth since the last census and to census undercounts of the Mexican-origin population, or it may be a result of both population growth and undercounts.

mushrooms on a year-round basis and spend months, if not years, away from their families and communities. If authorized to work in the United States, the migrants return home on an annual basis. However, if they are not authorized, they may not return to Mexico for a number of years.

The study was carried out from 2001 to 2003, using an ethnographic research protocol designed for finding and studying migrants (see García & González, 1995). The premise of the study was that the migrants' status in the country—as foreign single men and, at times, unauthorized or undocumented/illegal—places them at higher risk for substance abuse. They live without their families in relatively isolated farmworker housing compounds or overcrowded apartment units for years, and seldom visit kin in nearby communities because of the lack of time and transportation. Missing in these living situations are family- and community-based deterrents to heavy drinking and drug use. These deterrents, described elsewhere (García & Gonzalez, n.d.), are sanctions against substance abuse, the presence of kin-based authority figures, and a familial support base. A demanding and heavy work schedule also adds to the stress of these unconventional living arrangements. Additionally, migrant workers are exposed to heavy alcohol consumption and drug use in their U.S. work sites and in their hometowns in Mexico. Through this exposure to poly substance use, some migrants start to complement their drinking activities with drug use in order to cope with their plight.

We discovered that single migrant workers—unmarried laborers or married laborers without their families—are the primary drinkers. Immigrant workers also consumed alcohol but not to the same extent as their migratory counterparts. Binge drinking was observed among the migrants on the weekends, or on special occasions, such as a birthday or the arrival or departure of a kinsman or a close friend. Five or more drinks over a three to four hour period is considered binge drinking (Weschler, Austin, & Schuckit, 1998). In a camp of 45 workers, for example, in which anywhere from 15 to 20 workers are regular drinkers, up to 18 cases of 12-ounce beer cans are consumed on a weekend. These drinkers are mainly in their twenties and thirties—reflecting the major age groups in the camps. In some of the camps, up to 80 percent of the men binge drink on the weekends, when most binge drinking primarily occurs. It usually starts on Friday afternoon, immediately after work or in the evening, and continues through Saturday night. The men limit their drinking on Sunday—aware that it will be difficult to meet the harvest quotas with a hangover. However, some of the camp dwellers, those with serious drinking problems, drink alcohol every day, including during work. These workers are not dismissed as long as they are able to meet their harvest quotas.

The men do not consider binge drinking a problem, but an entitlement or a reward for hard work. Binge drinking, as they explained, only becomes a problem when an individual drinks heavily everyday and struggles to stop, or does not follow drinking norms. We discovered that drinking norms, together with the presence of kin in some of the housing units, keep the men from driving after drinking or from becoming unruly. In most cases, after ingesting a large quantity of alcohol and becoming visibly inebriated, the individual would simply retire for the evening. Nonetheless, binge drinking does place the drinkers and others in peril. For example, regular binge drinking over time leads to serious health problems, such as cirrhosis of the liver, and accidents that can result in disabling injuries. Reporting to work after a night of heavy drinking also endangers the drinker and others. The worker may cut himself or a fellow worker or may slip and fall, injuring himself to the point of becoming disabled.

The findings of the study substantiated its premise—that the status of the migrants in the United States as foreign single men, at times unauthorized to work in the country—places them at a high risk for binge drinking. Binge drinking among the migrants, as the research

report documents, is determined by, and is a product of, their migrant status as single foreign workers physically dislocated from family, community, and social support in Mexico. In the United States, away from home for months, if not years, they find themselves in a migrant subculture, not of their making and alien to their traditional way of life back home. Many of the men live in labor camps, away from local communities. The grueling work schedule adds to the stress of residing in the camps. The men are constantly reminded of work and are unable to disassociate themselves from the mushroom harvest during their time off. With little public transportation at their disposal, they are also isolated from nearby communities, where they may have kin and could possibly find distraction from their plight. This prolonged cultural dislocation from their familiar way of life in Mexico, aggravated by non-traditional living arrangements, social isolation, and stressful work schedules, lead some of the men to turn to alcohol. Peer pressure, another situational factor identified at the outset of the project, also contributes to drinking. However, it does not play as central a role as originally thought. Peer pressure or subtle coaxing to have a drink is not widespread, but occurs depending on kinship, age, and dyadic relationship norms.

Mandas and Juramentos

The alcohol study also revealed that local private and public mainstream alcohol and substance abuse programs in Southern Chester County do not include Mexican migrants as their primary clientele and the migrants do not seek their services, at least not of their own free will. Practitioners and migrants usually encounter each other only when the drinking problem has become grave: in an emergency room or through a referral from an employer or the courts. Migrants who have been referred to and have participated in these programs often do not complete the therapy and counseling. A major problem is that the practitioners do not have a clear understanding of the migrants, their culture, and their drinking problems. The migrants also do not have a tradition of turning to therapists, or any strangers for that matter, to discuss their substance abuse problems. Instead, we argue that migrants in Southern Chester County and their families in Mexico turn to *mandas* and *juramentos* to deal with substance abuse problems. The actual numbers who engage in these practices were unknown at the time of this writing.

A review of the literature revealed little on the subject of *juramentos* and *mandas*. Most of the available information is only covered in passing in scholarly sources (Brandis, 2002) or is anecdotal and printed as special interest stories in newspapers. Only one or two articles were found for each practice, many of which are fairly outdated (see Gudeman, 1976; 1988; Zabicky & Solis, 2000). Nonetheless, from the available information and informal interviews in the field, we learned that *mandas* and *juramentos* are in essence vows or promises made to a saint. Saints are individuals who have lived an exemplary Catholic life and who have been recognized by the Catholic Church as helping to grant miracles. There are over 10,000 saints in Catholicism, but only a select number are called upon when making a vow. Patron saints are believed to have influence over certain situations because of their special backgrounds or experiences in their lives. Our Lady of Guadalupe, for example, is seen as the patron or representative of Mexicans. Patron saints are also special protectors or guardians over specific areas of life, such as occupations, children, travelers, and illnesses. All saints, devotees believe, intercede on the behalf of those who seek their help (Gudeman, 1976; 1988). Simply put, saints hear prayers and convey them to God, who ultimately grants the request or miracle. The vows, especially if successfully met, reaffirm religious beliefs and restore a sense of spirituality in the individual, an inner peace and a positive relationship with family, friends, and oneself.

Juramentos

The *juramento* is a religious vow or pledge that a problem drinker makes to Our Lady of Guadalupe or another saint in exchange for divine intervention in abstaining from alcohol consumption. This vow is based on the Mexican's own idiosyncratic religious beliefs and cultural background (Zabicky & Solis, 2000). It is a ritualized pledge, made by an individual seeking assistance from a saint, and ultimately God, to abstain from drinking for a specific period of time. The period ranges from a few months—often three or six months—to one year. Longer pledges of abstinence, for instance, over year, are rare. If needed, the pledge is renewed at the end of the abstinence period, and may be repeated as many times as the *jurado* (the individual making the pledge) deems it necessary. The *juramento* does not require a gift or a sacrifice to the granting saint as a sign of gratitude. Gratitude is demonstrated by fulfilling the pledge.

In Mexico, it is common for a problem drinker to visit a church to *jurar*, or swear, before Our Lady of Guadalupe, if not another saint, that he will remain sober with her help for a specific period of time. However, *juramentos*, as we discovered, are not as frequent in some rural communities in Mexico as they are in Southern Chester County. In La Ordeña and other communities in rural Guanajuato, where we have conducted fieldwork, for example, making a *juramento* is not always possible. La Ordeña is one of the communities in the state with a significant number of expatriates and migrants in Southern Chester County (for further information about La Ordeña see Garcia, 1998a). In fact, nearly half of the houses in the community are abandoned because of immigration to Kennett Square and other communities in the region. Part of the reason for not making *juramentos* on a regular basis may be that there is no resident priest in the community, only a visiting priest who gives mass on Sundays and administers baptisms, confirmations, and marriages by appointment. These priests are often busy because they are responsible for the sacraments in a number of communities. Another reason is that some of the priests are not inclined to help in making a *juramento* because they see it as too archaic. They are of the opinion that *juramentos* and *mandas* are associated with folk religion and not the modern doctrine of the church.

There is no single *juramento* ritual or process. It differs from one priest to another or from one local tradition to another. As a priest in Guanajuato, Mexico, made clear:

There is no single *juramento* ritual in the church; the *juramento* is more in line with popular religion than doctrine. There is no single norm, for example, similar to celebrating mass. In celebrating mass, there is a single format and accompanying ritual here and in China. The language will differ but the manner in which it is administered is the same. Other religions have similar rules on this matter. However, the *juramento* is not standardized in the church as are the sacraments related to mass. The *juramento* varies. Every diocese, parish, and church has its own way of administering a *juramento*, and they are not written (Sacerdote Rogelio Segundo, Parroquia de Tierras Negras, Celaya, January 17, 2004).

Monsignor Frank Depman helps individuals to make *juramentos* after mass at one of the five parish churches or at the Misión Santa María. On average, he assists about 100 individuals per year to make *juramentos* (Monsignor Frank Depman, personal communication, December 23, 2005). In the past, a visiting priest from Mexico also assisted in the making of *juramentos* in the region. Monsignor Depman, it should be noted, is also an advocate of secular treatment programs, and he was unfamiliar with the practice of *juramentos* until he arrived at Southern Chester County. *Juramentos*, as he shared, were not part of his training at the seminary (Monsignor Depman, personal communication, 2005). He first heard of *juramentos* when members of the Mexican origin population, overwhelmingly men, began to ask for them. Unfamiliar with the practice, he started to

inquire about their. A deacon in the area explained the practice and described the key steps in the *juramento* process, such as acknowledging a drinking problem, making a vow, signing a *juramento* card, and receiving a blessing.

The *juramento* process, as Monsignor Depman conducts it, begins with the individual acknowledging that he has a drinking problem and that he must do something about it. At a parish church or the Misión Santa María, the candidate arrives with friends and family members, often his wife if he is an immigrant. The presence of friends and family is not required in the *juramento* process, but they serve as moral support. In some cases, members of the accompanying party are viewed as *padrinos* of the *jurado*, as spiritual sponsors similar to those common in other sacraments. At the Misión Santa María, the *juramento* is made at the altar of Our Lady of Guadalupe away from public view. If he wishes, the individual confesses. He then kneels in front of the statue of Our Lady of Guadalupe and vows to abstain from drinking for a specific period of time. Together with Monsignor Frank Depman, he prays. After the vow, the individual signs a wallet-size *juramento* card that is then laminated. On one side of the card is Our Lady of Guadalupe, and on the other side, a sobriety pledge, the sobriety period, and the signature of the *jurado*. The card and the individual are blessed at the end of the process.

The pledge on the card reads:

I, (name of person making the pledge), promise not to drink for the following time period (time period is written down), from this date (starting date is written down) to this date (end date is written down). I beg God to give me the strength to keep this pledge and the resolve to heal myself for my benefit and for my family. On my knees before the Virgin of Guadalupe I plead that I be able to faithfully meet this promise and that I be able to walk away from occasions and individuals who will lead me down the path of drinking (the signature of the person making the pledge, together with that of a witness; usually Monsignor Frank Depman's signature follows).

The pledge card is carried by the pledge-maker and is read during times of temptation to drink in order to gain strength to remain sober. It is also to be shown to anyone who insists that he drink. The *juramento* is respected, especially by other Catholics, and counters peer pressure to drink or use drugs, allowing for abstinence from drinking and drug use.

Making a vow to Our Lady of Guadalupe is equivalent to a sacred promise. It is this sacred promise that keeps the *jurado* from using/drinking alcohol. Ideally, during the period of abstinence, the *jurado* prays to Our Lady of Guadalupe on a daily basis, or during moments of temptation or weakness, and attends mass regularly. To break the promise, in the eyes of some, is to commit a sin (Monsignor Frank Depman, personal communication, December 23, 2005). Nonetheless, despite their best intentions, some individuals relapse and return to drinking. When this occurs, it is not unusual for these individuals to attend confession and to seek forgiveness for their sin, and for them to make another *juramento* (Monsignor Frank Depman, personal communication, December 23, 2005).

Case Study: Don Agapito

The case of Don Agapito will be presented as an example of an ex-migrant, now an immigrant in Southern Chester County, who has made a number of *juramentos*. His case will give the reader an idea of the *juramento* process. Don Agapito is 33 years old and from Toluca, Mexico, where he met his wife. He is the middle child of eight siblings and has only completed the equivalent of an elementary school education. Together, he and his wife have three children, ages, three, nine, and thirteen. The two firstborn children were born in

Toluca, the youngest in Southern Chester County. In Mexico, prior to migrating, he constructed coffins for a local undertaker in his town. In 2000, Don Agapito immigrated with his wife and two children to Hocassion, Delaware, and in 2003, moved to Kennett Square. He is currently employed as a landscaper for a local company, and his wife looks after their three children.

To date, Don Agapito has made three *juramentos*. In fact, there is a tradition of making *juramentos* in his family. His father made a number of them before remaining abstinent. Don Agapito's first two *juramentos* were made in his home state of Toluca, to the Virgin of Carmen in Tenancingo. He said he made his first *juramento* because he was drinking too much. He would drink beer and any other alcoholic beverage he could get his hands on. The first *juramento* was made for a period of six months, but he was unable to keep the pledge. That is, he started to drink before the end of the six month abstinence period. Don Agapito is convinced that he was punished by the Virgin of Carmen for breaking his vow to her. En route to Tenancingo to ask the Virgin for forgiveness, he was involved in an accident when the brakes of his automobile failed. Fortunately, no one was seriously injured. Six months later, after asking for forgiveness, he made his second *juramento* to the same saint, this time for a period of one year. During the six months between the first and second *juramentos*, he also abstained from alcohol. Don Agapito successfully completed his second *juramento*. His last *juramento* was made to Our Lady of Guadalupe at the Misión Santa María in 2004. Monsignor Depman administered this last *juramento*. Don Agapito pledged an abstinence period of six months, and since completing it, he has not had a drink, except for a few drinks the previous Christmas. Don Agapito believes that the *juramentos* have demonstrated to him that he does not need to drink in order to be happy and that he can live without consuming alcohol.

Mandas

Mandas are also practiced in Mexican folk Catholicism. A *manda* is a vow to a saint whose assistance is sought because he or she specializes in a specific cause or miracle (Gudeman, 1988). When making a *manda*, an individual calls on a saint to bring his or her case to God so that he can intervene and solve a problem, such as providing a cure for an illness, ending the destructive drinking behavior of a family member, or protecting a family member in the United States without proper immigration documents. In return, the individual promises to perform a personal sacrifice or an act of charity to demonstrate gratitude for divine intervention and assistance.

Individuals can make *mandas* for themselves or on behalf of others. Similar to the *juramento*, there is no single protocol associated with making a *manda*. They are made in private either at home or at church. At home, *mandas* are made at the family altar, in the presence of an image of the saint whose intervention and assistance is being sought, with little or no formal ritual other than praying and lighting a candle. The process of making a *manda* is essentially a private affair and does not include a priest or involve the presence of others.

Preferably, however, *mandas* should be made at a church, ideally at a shrine of a patron saint. These *mandas* involve more ritual than the home variety. In some cases, the devotee enters the church or shrine on his or her knees holding a rosary and praying, kneels at the altar of a saint once inside, makes a vow to reciprocate with a personal sacrifice or gift, prays to the saint and makes other prayers, and lights a candle. Votive objects, that is, objects pertaining to a vow (a letter from, or a personal item of the individual for whom intervention is being sought, such as a lock of hair, an article of clothing, or a photograph) may be placed at the altar or at the feet of the saint. Until there is resolution, the *manda* or

vow is reinforced by daily prayers, and upon resolution, the individual keeps his or her promise. He or she makes a personal sacrifice, gives up a certain food or beverage, makes a gift to the church, visits or organizes a pilgrimage to the shrine of the saint who was instrumental in the miracle, or dresses up like the saint to show gratitude. Votive objects are also offered as gratitude by those who have been restored to health or saved from terrible danger. Church walls or images of saints in Mexico are often covered with these votive offerings.

In La Ordeña, Guanajuato, a community that has lost nearly half of its 850 (pre-immigration 1980 figure) inhabitants to immigration to Southern Chester County, four saints are frequently called upon for divine intervention. They are San Judas de Thaddaeus (Saint Jude of Thaddaeus), Santo Niño de Atocha (Christchild of Atocha), La Soledad (Our Lady of Sorrows), and Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe (Our Lady of Guadalupe). Saint Jude of Thaddaeus is the patron saint of desperate cases or lost causes. His assistance is sought to resolve the most desperate situations because his New Testament letter stresses that the faithful should persevere through harsh, difficult circumstances. Santo Niño de Atocha is revered as the special patron for those who are in prison, those in trouble with immigration authorities, and those facing a court case. La Soledad, or our Lady of Sorrows, is the patron saint of La Ordeña and other communities of the region. She is the personification of Mary after the loss of her son, Jesus. For this reason, she is honored during Easter with a major procession. Our Lady of Guadalupe, as mentioned earlier, is the patron saint of Mexico and all of the Americas. She is known as the patron saint of all causes, and has an incredible list of miracles and cures attributed to her intervention. Yearly, an estimated 10 million visit her Basilica in Mexico City, making it the most popular shrine in the world, and the most visited Catholic Church in the Americas (Brandis, 2002).

In La Ordeña, mothers and wives of migrants working in Southern Chester County make *mandas* regularly. These family members, who do not migrate, but remain in Mexico, seek divine intervention in order to protect their loved ones as they journey to live and work in the United States. In particular, they make *mandas* to God, Our Lady of Sorrows, the patron saint of the region, and other saints, in order to seek protection over their loved ones. They seek protection from a number of natural and human dangers faced by their loved ones as they enter the United States without proper immigration documents.

Prayer is very important in making a *manda*. The following are examples of two prayers used in *mandas* made to protect a loved one who risks entering into the United States without proper documentation:

1. Prayer to God

Father of Mine; Miraculous Saint Christ

As you are so powerful

Free them from any evil

From fights, from mortal wounds

From wild animals in hills, mountains, and plains

By the wounds of your hands

And your holy eyes

You free them from dangers

And from the evil neighbors

That want to harm them

2. Prayer to Christchild of Atocha

Holy Manuel de Atocha

You be their guide, their star

Their north and their way so

They can walk safe of any enemy

These two prayers, as can be seen, make reference to the dangers faced when physically traversing dangerous terrain to enter the United States. For example, the first specifically mentions “Free them from evil”, “From fights, from mortal wounds”, “From wild animals in hills, mountains, and plains”. The second refers to providing a safe passage through the dangers: “You be their guide, their star”, “Their north and their way so They can walk safe of any enemy”.

Upon hearing word of their loved ones’ safe border crossing and arrival at their destinations, mothers and wives travel to the chapel of La Soledad and give thanks in person. This can be done in a number of ways. One of the more common ways is entering the church on one’s knees, lighting a candle and praying at the altar. On Easter Sunday, many people from La Ordeña and the surrounding communities take buses or walk to the chapel of La Soledad to attend a celebration with fireworks, food, and drink. This, too, is another way of giving thanks.

The mothers and wives of migrants and other relatives also make *mandas* asking a particular saint to intervene and keep their sons or husbands from abusing alcohol or other drugs. These *mandas* are made in the same fashion as the others and serve as a form of substance abuse treatment. How do *mandas* contribute to substance abuse treatment? Through informal interviews, we learned that *mandas* draw on the spirituality of the person making the *manda* and of the person for whom the *manda* is made. It creates hope for both of them. But more importantly, it contributes to the mental well-being of the two and links them to their religion and spirituality and their homeland in Mexico. They do not feel alone, but fortified and empowered to deal with the problem at hand.

The Role of Juramentos and Mandas in Substance Abuse Prevention and Intervention

From a substance abuse research perspective, the important question becomes: do *juramentos* and *mandas* work? Are they effective intervention mechanisms that contribute to recovery? We did not examine the outcomes of the *juramentos* and *mandas* in a systematic fashion. Instead, we made observations and recorded specific cases. On the basis of this information, albeit limited, we found evidence that the two practices do in fact work. However, the effectiveness of the *juramentos*, as practiced at the Misión Santa María, needs to be evaluated systematically. Their effectiveness, we suspect, depends on the faith and spirituality of the individual. That is, if he or she believes and seldom doubts, the outcomes are more likely to be positive. We did not find this surprising, given that *juramentos* and *mandas* draw on the spirituality of the individual. Mainstream alcohol intervention programs, such as Alcoholics Anonymous, share the same premise. The two work by creating a spiritual inner peace and positive relationship with family, friends, and oneself. Such a relationship is important for recovery and sobriety, as the literature indicates (see Baez & Hernandez, 2001; Bensley, 1991; De La Cancela & Martinez, 1983; Hodge & Pittman, 2003). If an individual is unable to commune with himself, it is difficult for him to sustain a fellowship with others. After all, despair, hopelessness and guilt often lead to isolation, drinking, and destructiveness, rather than a sense of community and fulfillment.

Studies, cited earlier, have shown that people who live by spiritual principles are healthier, happier, and more successful than those not practicing a spiritual lifestyle. Improving spiritual health may not cure an illness, but it may help the individual feel better, prevent some health problems and help cope with illnesses, including alcohol addiction.

Available evidence indicates that *mandas* and *juramentos* show significant promise in substance abuse treatment. However, we need more research to assess the treatment value of these religious practices. In regard to *Juramentos*, for instance, we need to find out specifically who among the transnational migrants makes *juramentos* and under what circumstances. We also need to discover if sobriety continues beyond the period of abstinence in the pledge, or if drinking and drug use resumes again until the next *juramento*. Additionally, we do not know if it works for all of the migrants or only for those with certain characteristics, such as a strong sense of spirituality and a drinking or drug use problem in its early stages. If we find that the *juramento* indeed makes a difference in curtailing substance abuse, we need to expand and institutionalize it in other Catholic parishes with a high concentration of transnational Mexican workers. We also have to coordinate the *juramento* with other substance abuse prevention and intervention programs aimed at transnational workers in order to provide a comprehensive treatment approach. Preventing and treating binge drinking and drug use effectively requires these partnerships.

Conclusion

Religion is very important in the daily lives of people. It provides explanations, gives life meaning, and offers hope in the face of despair and adversity. Religious beliefs are powerful and remain at the center of one's identity, values, and worldview for life, regardless of geographical location and mobility. In fact, religion often plays a major role when migrating or immigrating to another country. Transnational populations, as Hagan and Ebaugh (2003) documented, draw on their religious beliefs when immigrating or migrating to the United States. These beliefs are practiced in six identified phases of migration: (1) decision making, (2) preparing for the trip, (3) the actual journey, (4) the arrival, (5) the role of the ethnic church in immigrant settlement, and (6) the development of transnational linkages.

Mexican immigrants and migrants to Southern Chester County are no exception. They, too, turn to familiar religious beliefs in unfamiliar and foreign surroundings. Upon arriving in Pennsylvania, they continue to be Catholic and draw on their religion on a daily basis. Their folk version of the Catholic faith, as practiced in Mexico, is also not abandoned. In fact, they introduce their own religious practices to the Catholic Church, and in the process learn firsthand that different populations and nations practice the same religion differently. Progressive priests in contact with the Mexican-origin population, such as Father Charles Kennedy in the past and Monsignor Frank Depman at the Misión Santa María in the present, practice cultural relativism, and welcome and incorporate folk beliefs when reaching out to and ministering to this relatively new population in the region. Well aware that these practices are at the core of Mexican Catholicism, they tap into them to meet the pastoral needs of the Mexican migrants and immigrants, especially helping them to recover from drinking and other substance abuse problems. As discussed in this chapter, *juramentos* and *mandas* are specifically used for this purpose.

In Guanajuato, Mexico, there are little, if any, substance abuse treatment programs for residents in rural communities such as La Ordeña. Treatment centers in nearby cities are too expensive and beyond the means of most individuals. Hence, rural populations draw on their Catholic beliefs and practices to address drinking problems. Through *juramentos* and *mandas*, they turn to the saints and God for divine intervention. In some communities, such as La Ordeña, which does not have a priest, residents travel to nearby Moroleon to make a

juramento or *manda* for themselves or their loved ones. These practices, as demonstrated in this chapter, are not abandoned upon migration to southeastern Pennsylvania—and may be used more due to a lack of the social support the migrants would have in Mexico. Both migrants and immigrants turn to religion when they reach the conclusion that they have a drinking problem. They seek out Monsignor Frank Depman at the Misión Santa María who knows about *juramentos* and *mandas*, and knows how to carry them out. At times, believers travel from surrounding communities, as far away as Maryland and Delaware, to make a *juramento*. In doing so, they are transplanting their religious beliefs and practices, which are being incorporated by the Catholic Church, and in the process keeping them alive in a new land.

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Table 1

Ethnic Population Size, Kennett Square, Pennsylvania, 1990 and 2000

Year	Blacks	Hispanics	Non-Hispanic Whites	Other	Total Population
1990	600/11.4%	662/12.6%	3,918/75.08%	38/0.92	5,218/100%
2000	507/9.6%	1,470/27.9%	3,183/60.4%	113/2.1%	5,273/100%

Sources: U.S. Bureau of Census, General Population Characteristics, Pennsylvania, Washington, D.C., 1992; <http://factfinder.census.gov>, 2001.

Table 2

Ethnic Population Size, Toughkenamon, Pennsylvania, 1990 and 2000

Year	Blacks	Hispanics	Non-Hispanic Whites	Other	Total Population
1990	43/03.38%	500/39.28%	726/57.03%	4/0.31%	1,273/100%
2000	33/2.4%	665/48.4%	658/47.9%	19/0.01%	1,375/100%

Sources: U.S. Bureau of Census, General Population Characteristics, Pennsylvania, Washington, D.C., 1992; <http://factfinder.census.gov>, 2001.