

Trading meetings for fiestas

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Since two communities—English- and Spanish-speaking—have [begun to find a path together in my church](#), one thing has become abundantly clear: I am going to be going to a lot more parties.

Our Spanish-speaking community has parties for everything, and everything is a party. The entire month of December was devoted to parties, beginning with a celebration of the Virgin of Guadalupe on December 12 and ending on Christmas Eve with a party that included a piñata and lasted until two in the morning. (By which time, trust me, I had been at home in bed for many hours.)

Even on Ash Wednesday—a solemn occasion in both cultures—the English-speaking community slipped in and out for a quiet, contemplative service at 5 p.m. The Spanish speakers gathered later for a dispensation of the ashes—along with a huge buffet of food and 8 p.m. mochas.

I admit that when it comes to church, I am more comfortable in meetings than at parties. Meetings for vestry, liturgy, music, children's activities, food bank, community meals. My idea of a bicultural church is a bicultural meeting. I run a good meeting. I schedule them weeks ahead. I make sure they are efficient and productive. I don't *love* meetings, but I know how to organize a community in and through them.

Our church's parties are often spontaneous, or at least they seem so to me. Time and place are arranged by cell phone and text message. At parties, there is little for me to do except fill up my plate with food, compliment the chef, and sit back trying out my faulty Spanish.

This is surprisingly difficult. I notice two things about myself. I like to keep my spirituality private and separate—a result, I imagine, of my individual communion with God. And I like my church life to be action oriented. I want to be doing.

At one recent party, the latter part of me took over and I elbowed my way to the stove to make pupusas, despite the clear signals that the hostess wished me to be elsewhere. I have a lot to learn, and these two things—my individualism and my action orientation—may be the things most in need of transformation. The Mexican and Salvadoran people with whom I now share a church find God in their connection with one another, and they play as well as work together. They seek out and celebrate that connection with an intensity that is new and surprising and even difficult for me.

Meetings for fiestas. It hardly feels like a fair exchange. But pass the horchata; I'll give it a go.