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(PROLADES)

**ENCYCLOPEDIA OF RELIGIOUS GROUPS IN
LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN:
RELIGION IN MEXICO**

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RELIGION IN MEXICO

Country Summary

The United Mexican States (*Estados Unidos Mexicanos*) constitute one of the largest countries (an area of 1,972,550 km² or 761,606 square miles) in the Americas, located geographically in North America between the USA in the north and Guatemala and Belize in the southeast. It is bordered on the east by the Gulf of Mexico (part of the Caribbean Sea) and on the west by the Pacific Ocean. Mexico's population in mid-2000 was estimated at 97.5 million and in mid-2008 at 109 million, third in population size in the Americas after the USA and Brazil.

The nation is composed of a diversity of ethnic groups: Mestizos (mixed Spanish-Indian blood who are native Spanish-speakers), 88 percent; Amerindians (239 living languages among 13 linguistical families), 9 percent; and others (including North Americans, Europeans, Afro-Americans, Middle Easterners and Asians), 3 percent. The predominant Amerindian languages are: Náhuatl, Maya, Mixteco, Zapoteco, Otomí, Tzeltal, Tzotzil, Totonaco, Chol, Mazahua and Huasteco.

Mexico is home to the largest number of U.S. citizens abroad (an estimated one million in 1999), which represents one percent of its total Mexican population and 25 percent of all U.S. citizens living abroad. Other significant communities of foreigner residents include those from Central and South America, primarily from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Peru, Cuba, Venezuela, Guatemala and Belize. The Argentine community is considered to be the second-largest foreign community in the country (an estimated 150,000). Throughout the 20th century, the Mexican government granted asylum to fellow Latin Americans and Europeans (mostly Spaniards in the 1930s) who fled political persecution in their home countries.



The official name of the country has had some changes since its creation: the First Mexican Empire (1821-1823), United Mexican States (1824-1836), Mexican Republic (1836-1863), Second Mexican Empire (1863-1867), and finally, since the Constitution of 1917, as the United Mexican States.

Mexico is a federation of 31 free and sovereign states that together exercise jurisdiction over the Federal District (Mexico City) and other territories. Each state has its own constitution, legislature and judiciary; and its citizens elect by direct vote a governor for a six-year term, as well as representatives to their respective state legislatures for three-year terms. Constitutionally, Mexico City is the federal capital; the Federal District is a special political division that belongs to the federation as a whole and not to a particular state, and as such has more limited local rule than the individual states.

In mid-2005, the population of the nation's 10 largest cities was as follows: (1) Mexico City Metropolitan Area (the Federal District and adjacent urban areas in the State of Mexico) 19,231,829; (2) Guadalajara (State of Jalisco) 4,095,853; (3) Monterrey (State of Nuevo León) 3,664,331; (4) Puebla (State of Puebla) 2,109,049; (5) Toluca (State of Mexico) 1,610,786; (6) Tijuana (State of Baja California) 1,483,992; (7) León (State of Guanajuato) 1,425,210; (8) Ciudad Juárez (State of Chihuahua) 1,313,338; (9) Torreón (State of Coahuila) 1,110,890; and (10) San Luis Potosí (State of San Luis Potosí) 957,753.

The Mexico City Metro Area was the fastest growing metropolitan area in the country until the late 1980s. Since then, the annual rate of growth of the agglomeration has decreased, and it is lower than that of the other four largest metropolitan areas (namely Greater Guadalajara, Greater Monterrey, Greater Puebla and Greater Toluca) even though it is still positive. The net migration rate of Mexico City proper (Federal District) between 1995 and 2000, however, was negative, which means that residents are moving to the suburbs of the metropolitan area, to other states of Mexico, or emigrating to the USA. Also, the Federal Government instituted a policy of decentralization in order to reduce the environmental pollutants of the growing conurbation.

Mexico is crossed from north to south by two mountain ranges known as Sierra Madre Oriental (extends 1,350 km) and Sierra Madre Occidental (extends 5,000 km), which are the extension of the Rocky Mountains in the U.S. and Canada. From east to west at the center, the country is crossed by the Trans-Mexican Volcanic Belt (*Cordillera Neovolcánica*), also known as the Sierra Nevada. The Central Plateau (*altiplano*) stretches from the U.S. border to the Trans-Mexican Volcanic Belt and occupies the vast expanse of land between the eastern and western Sierra Madres. A low east-west range divides the altiplano into northern and southern sections. These two sections, previously called the Mesa del Norte and Mesa Central, are now regarded by geographers as sections of one altiplano. The majority of the Mexican central and northern regions are located at high altitudes, and the highest elevations are found at the Trans-Mexican Volcanic Belt: Pico de Orizaba (5,700 meters, the third highest mountain in North America), Popocatepetl (5,462 m) and Iztaccíhuatl (5,286 m) and Nevado de Toluca (4,577 m). Three major urban agglomerations are located in the valleys between these four mountain peaks, called the southern altiplano: the Mexico City Metro Area, Puebla and Toluca. The southern altiplano averaging 2,000 meters in elevation is higher than its northern counterpart, which averages 1,100 meters in elevation. A fourth mountain range, the Sierra Madre del Sur, extends 1,200 km along Mexico's southern coast from the southwestern part of the Trans-Mexican Volcanic Belt in Michoacán south to the nearly flat Isthmus of Tehuantepec. The isthmus – 125 miles across at its narrowest point from coast to coast – includes the south-eastern parts of Veracruz and Oaxaca, including small areas of Chiapas and Tabasco. The states of Tabasco, Chiapas, Campeche, Yucatán and Quintana Roo are east of the isthmus, with Veracruz and Oaxaca on the west. Geographically, the isthmus divides North America from Central America. The northern side of the isthmus is swampy and densely covered with jungle, which has been a greater obstacle to railway construction than the grades in crossing the Sierra Madres. Southeast of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, the Sierra Madre de Chiapas runs 280 km along the Pacific Coast from the Oaxaca-Chiapas border to Mexico's border with Guatemala.

As a regional power and the only Latin American member of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) since 1994, Mexico is firmly established as an upper middle-income country. It is considered a newly-industrialized country and has the 11th largest economy in the world by GDP by purchasing power parity, and also the largest GDP per capita in Latin America according to the International Monetary Fund. The Mexican economy is strongly linked to its North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) partners. Despite being

considered an emerging power, Mexico's uneven income distribution and the increase in drug-related violence are issues of public concern.

The remittances from Mexican citizens working in the USA in 2004 accounted for only 0.2% of Mexico's GDP, which was equal to US\$20 billion dollars per year in 2004 and was the seventh largest source of foreign income after oil, industrial and manufactured goods, electronics, automobiles and food exports. Mexico's major natural resources are petroleum, silver, copper, gold, lead, zinc, natural gas and timber.

According to the *The CIA World Factbook* (2009), Mexico has a free market economy that recently entered the trillion-dollar class. It contains a mixture of modern and outmoded industry and agriculture, increasingly dominated by the private sector. Recent administrations have expanded competition in seaports, railroads, telecommunications, electricity generation, natural gas distribution, and airports. Per capita income is one-fourth that of the U.S. and income distribution remains highly unequal. Trade with the U.S. and Canada has tripled since the implementation of NAFTA in 1994. Mexico has 12 free trade agreements with over 40 countries, including Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, the European Free Trade Area, and Japan; more than 90 percent of Mexico's trade is under free trade agreements. In 2007, during its first year in office, the Felipe Calderón administration was able to garner support from the opposition to successfully pass a pension and a fiscal reform. The administration continues to face many economic challenges including the need to upgrade infrastructure, modernize labor laws, and allow private investment in the energy sector. President Calderón has stated that his top economic priorities remain reducing poverty and creating jobs.

On September 19, 1985, a devastating earthquake (measuring approximately 8.1 on the Richter scale) struck the State of Michoacán and inflicted severe damage on Mexico City. Estimates of the number killed range from 6,500 to 30,000.

Violent crime is a critical issue in Mexico, with a homicide rate varying from 11 to 14 per 100,000 inhabitants. Drug-traffic and narco-related criminal activities are a major concern for Mexican authorities. Drug cartels are active in the shared border with the U.S. and police corruption and collusion with drug cartels is a crucial problem. President Calderón has made combating drug-trafficking one of the top priorities of his administration. In a very controversial move, Calderón deployed military personnel to states and cities where drug cartels are known to operate, including the states along the U.S.-Mexican border (3,169 km or 1,969 miles). It is the most frequently crossed international border in the world, with about 250 million people crossing yearly.

For many generations Mexicans have illegally crossed the border into the United States. Reasons for the high rate of emigration from Mexico include the close proximity to the U.S. and the noticeable difference in the quality of life between the two countries. Many migrants come from poverty-stricken towns in Mexico and Central American countries and desire to migrate to the U.S. to achieve the "American dream." For many, just gaining employment at a low wage job in the U.S. provides a much higher standard of living than in their home country. During the 1980s, the U.S. witnessed a significant increase in illegal immigrants from Mexico. The immigration influx was not limited to Mexicans from one specific region but rather from communities throughout Mexico.

Current Religious Situation

Although Mexico continues to be dominated by the Roman Catholic Church, those claiming affiliation with Roman Catholicism declined from 89.7 percent of the total population in the 1990

census to 88.0 percent in the 2000 census. Protestant adherents increased from 5.0 percent in 1990 to 5.7 percent in 2000; those affiliated with “other religions” increased from 1.4 percent in 1990 to 1.9 percent in 2000; and those with “no religious affiliation” (or providing “no answer”) increased from 3.9 percent in 1990 to 4.4 percent in 2000. Mexico has the second-largest Catholic population in the world, after Brazil.

As of March 2009, the Government’s Office of Religious Associations (Subsecretariat of Population, Migration and Religious Affairs of the Secretariat of Government, known as SEGOB) reported a total of 7,073 officially registered religious associations (ARs) in Mexico. A previous report, issued in June 2005, listed 6,373 ARs, which can be classified as follows: Christian/Roman Catholic (2,962 or 46.5 percent), Christian/Orthodox (21), Christian/Protestant (3,298 or 51.8 percent), Christian/ Other (65), and non-Christian (27).

In the 2010 census, approximately 84 percent of the population identified themselves as Roman Catholic. Approximately 7.4 percent stated affiliation with a Protestant or Evangelical church, 2.3 percent identified themselves as members of other Bible-based religions (marginal Christian groups), less than one percent as affiliated with “other religions” (non-Christian groups), and 6.1 percent of the population reported no religious affiliation or unspecified. These calculations were made by PROLADES based on our analysis of the 2010 census data, using our definition of the Protestant movement.

The present Constitution provides for freedom of religion; it states that everyone is free to profess their chosen religious belief and to practice the ceremonies and acts of worship of their respective belief. Congress may not enact laws that establish or prohibit any religion. The Constitution also provides for the separation of Church and State. *The 1992 Law of Religious Associations and Public Worship define the administrative policies and remedies that protect the right to religious freedom.* A provision was added to the Constitution in 2001 that established, for the first time, a constitutional prohibition against any form of discrimination, including discrimination against persons of the basis of religion.

There have been reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief or practice, usually in small, rural communities in the southern states. However, the incidents of persecution are not exclusively for religious reasons, but rather due to a combination of political, cultural and religious tensions, which limit the free practice of religion within some communities. This is especially true in southern Mexico within some of the Amerindian communities where Protestants (commonly known as evangelicals) are occasionally persecuted by nominal Roman Catholics under the leadership of Amerindian village elders or caciques. Most incidents occurred in Chiapas, Guerrero and Oaxaca, and to a lesser extent in Mexico, Michoacán and Veracruz. Government officials, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and evangelical and Roman Catholic representatives agreed that these conflicts were often attributed to political, ethnic or land disputes, which were related to the traditional "practices and customs" of Amerindian communities.

Overview of social, religious and political development

When the Spanish conquistadors arrived in Mexico in the early 1600s, they discovered some of the greatest cultures in the history of mankind, beginning with the Olmec civilization that began about 1,200 BCE and continuing through the Aztec empire that dominated the central region of the country with its elaborate ceremonial and political center (Tenochtitlan) built on a man-made island in Lake Texcoco in the Valley of Mexico. Around 9,000 years ago, ancient Amerindians domesticated corn and initiated an agricultural revolution, which led to the formation of many

complex civilizations. Between 1,800 and 300 BCE, many of these matured into advanced Mesoamerican civilizations that are credited with many innovations, including cosmology, astronomy, writing, mathematics, government, militaries, engineering and medicine. These civilizations were organized around cities and pyramid-temples.

While many city-states, kingdoms and empires competed for power and prestige in Pre-Colombian times, Mexico is said to have had five major civilizations: the Olmec, Teotihuacan, Toltec, Aztec and Maya. At their peak, an estimated 350,000 Aztecs presided over a wealthy tribute-empire comprising around 10 million people, almost half of Mexico's estimated population of 24 million in 1500. After 4,000 years, the existing civilizations were destroyed after the arrival of the Spaniards in 1519 at a site that became the modern city of Veracruz, located on the Gulf of Mexico.

Conquistador Hernán Cortéz and his small army of 508 Spaniards supported by thousands of Tlaxcalteca allies conquered the Aztecs in 1521 and established Spanish rule on the ruins of the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan, renamed Mexico City. In 1519, the Aztec capital was the largest city in the world with a population of around 350,000; by comparison, the population of London in 1519 was only 80,000 people. At the time of the Spanish arrival, there were an estimated 25 million Amerindians in the territory known today as the nation of Mexico.

During the Spanish colonial period (1521-1821), Mexico was colonized and governed under the **Viceroyalty of New Spain** (1535 to 1821), during which time the majority of its Amerindian population was decimated by warfare, famine and disease. Formal independence from Spain was recognized in 1821. The U.S.-Mexican War (1846-1848) ended with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which ceded almost half of Mexico's national territory to the U.S., including present-day Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California). French forces invaded Mexico in 1861 and ruled briefly until 1867. The Mexican Revolution of 1910-1917 resulted in the death of an estimated 10 percent of the nation's population.

Between 1521 and 1821, there was a strict Church-State relationship in Mexico with the Roman Catholic Church. However, it was easier to build a Catholic church on top of the ruins of an ancient Indian worship center than to impose a new culture, religion and government upon a civilization that predated Spanish rule by many centuries. The persistence of Amerindian cultures and belief systems is a vital force in modern Mexican society, as seen by the prevalence of animistic practices such as shamanism (intermediaries between the human and spirit worlds), magic and witchcraft (*bujería*), herbal healing (*curanderismo*), and "folk saints and healers" throughout Mexico.

The Catholic clergy attempted to bridge the gap between the Spanish and Amerindian cultures by establishing a chapel to Our Lady of Guadalupe at Tepeyac hill (now a suburb of Mexico City) in 1555-1556, which later became the most sacred site for Catholics in Mexico. Future generations of clerics embellished the legend of Our Lady of Guadalupe, so that by 1648 Mexican peasants considered the shrine to have supernatural significance and to be a sign of divine approval for regarding themselves as the "new chosen people" (a cosmic race) that God had selected through the agency of the Virgin Mary, who, according to the legend, miraculously appeared to a group of shepherds at Tepeyac in 1531.

After Independence from Spain in 1821, the Roman Catholic Church began to lose its place of privilege in Mexican society, because citizens were no longer obligated to pay tithes or to work for the Church as serfs in a feudal society. However, the Catholic Church did maintain its monopoly on religion in Mexico as affirmed by the Constitution of 1824, which declared that religion "will perpetually be Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman." Full diplomatic relations were

maintained with the Vatican until broken in 1867, following the period of French intervention in Mexican politics.

From Independence to the Mexican Revolution (1821-1910), the Catholic Church sided with the more Conservative political parties, but certain elements with the Church identified with the revolutionary struggle of the peasants against the landed aristocracy, such as Father Miguel Hidalgo and other liberal-minded priests like Father José María Morelos. For his efforts, Hidalgo was excommunicated, murdered and his head left to rot outside a village church. The historic division between the hierarchy of the Catholic Church and the grassroots church, the “popular religion of the masses,” has continued to the present.

During the rest of the 19th century, the Catholic Church was heavily involved in politics on the side of the Conservatives who opposed the Liberal movement and Freemasonry that gained popularity among the wealthy elite. The Catholic hierarchy opposed the reform movement led by Benito Juárez and welcomed the French occupation of Mexico in 1862 under Maximilian of Hapsburg. But the French imperial venture did not survive the stiff resistance of Mexican nationalistic forces and U.S. political pressure. In 1867 Juárez returned to the presidency and counteracted the threat posed by the Catholic hierarchy after capturing and executing Maximilian.

Although Church-State tensions eased considerably during the Conservative administration of Porfirio Díaz (1876-1910), they flared up again after the Revolution of 1910-1917. The Constitution of 1917 established a clear separation between Church and State, guaranteed that public education would be secular and humanistic, and prohibited the clergy from participating in the nation's political life and from owning property. This meant that all Church property became the patrimony of the State.

The Cristero War (1926-1929) was an attempt by Conservative Catholic forces to invalidate certain anti-religious laws included in the Constitution of 1917, which were opposed by the Catholic bishops and their political allies. When Conservative attempts to amend the Constitution failed, Catholics in the states of Jalisco, Guerrero, Michoacán, Colima, Guanajuato, Querétaro, Puebla and Veracruz resorted to armed violence against the government of President Elías Calles. The conflict claimed the lives of an estimated 90,000 people: 56,882 on the federal side, 30,000 Cristeros, and numerous civilians and Cristeros who were killed in anticlerical raids after the war's end. The war ended in June 1929 when President Emilio Portes Gil promised to end religious persecution and to respect the liberty of conscience, which allowed the Catholic clergy to save face and resume their religious obligations in Catholic churches throughout the country.

In the decades after the Mexican Revolution (1910-1917), the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI, *Partido Revolucionario Institucional*) came to power. A corporatist party machine, the leftist PRI controlled national politics from 1929 until 2001. It was not until the 1980s that the PRI lost a senate seat (1988) or a gubernatorial race (1989), events that marked the beginning of the party's loss of hegemony. Through the electoral reforms started by President Carlos Salinas de Gortari and consolidated by President Ernesto Zedillo, by the mid-1990s the PRI had lost its majority in Congress. In 2000, after seventy years, the PRI lost the presidential election to an opposition candidate, Vicente Fox Quesada, who won under the banner of the National Action Party (PAN, *Partido de Acción Nacional*), the most conservative of the nation's three major political parties. PAN has close ties to the Catholic Church. However, the continued non-PAN majority in Congress prevented him from implementing most of his proposed reforms during his term in office (2000-2006). In 2006, PAN candidate Felipe de Jesús Calderón Hinojosa, a self-described devout Roman Catholic, won the presidency for a six-year term (2006-2012). The third major political force in Mexico is the Party of the Democratic Revolution (*Partido de la*

Revolución Democrática, PRD), a center-left coalition of socialists and liberal parties, founded in 1989.

The Roman Catholic Church

The military conquest of Mexico by Spanish forces was generally perceived as the triumph of Catholicism over the various Amerindian deities, and particularly as the disintegration of the Aztec worldview that required continuous human blood sacrifice to sustain the universe. The defeat of Amerindian religious leaders and the destruction of their sacred temples and images by Cortés' army were seen as a spiritual conquest over a fundamentally-flawed brand of religion by agents of a superior religion. However, most of the Spanish friars were more ambivalent about associating their own missionary enterprise with military conquests.

The evangelization of the Amerindian tribes of Mexico by Roman Catholic missionaries began with the arrival of the Franciscans (1524), Dominicans (1526) and the Augustinians (1533). Between 1594 and 1722, the Jesuits worked among the Amerindians in northern Mexico, establishing mission centers in the Valley of Guadiana (Durango), Sinaloa, Sonora, Chihuahua, Baja California and Nayarit. During the 17th and 18th centuries, the Franciscans organized a vast mission empire that included 11 districts: from Sierra Gorda and Tampico in the northeast to Sonora, Arizona, New Mexico and Alta California in the northwest. The Dominicans established two important mission centers in Sierra Gorda (1686) and Baja California (1772).

Among the male religious orders established in Mexico during the Spanish colonial period were the Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinians, Carmelites, Brothers of St. James (Dieguinos), Jesuits, Mercedarians, Bethlehemites, Benedictines, Oratorians, and Brothers of St. John of God; and the female religious orders were the Poor Clares, Capuchines, Carmelites, Conceptionists, Cistercians, Augustinians and Dominicans.

The first Catholic bishopric erected in Mexico was the See of Yucatán, under the patronage of *Nuestra Señora de los Remedios*. In 1526, Pope Clement VII named Fray Julian de Garces as the first Bishop of New Spain. In 1545, at the solicitation of Spanish King Charles V, Pope Paul III separated the dioceses of New Spain from the metropolitan See of Seville and established the Archdiocese of Mexico.

During the Spanish colonial period (1520-1821), Catholic missionaries systematically established churches in nearly every village of Mexico prior to Independence from Spain. The Catholic clergy attempted to bridge the gap between the Spanish and Indian cultures by establishing a chapel to Our Lady of Guadalupe at Tepeyac in 1555-1556, which later became the most sacred site for Catholics in Mexico. Future generations of clerics embellished the legend of Our Lady of Guadalupe, so that by 1648 Mexican peasants considered the shrine to have supernatural significance and to be a sign of divine approval for regarding themselves as the new chosen people that God had selected through the agency of the Virgin Mary, who, according to the legend, miraculously appeared at Tepeyac in 1531.

Today, the Virgin of Guadalupe is a symbol of Mexican national identity. Few nations in the Americas are as Catholic as Mexico, where the Catholic religion stands at the center of Mexican society and is the heart of its culture, which is highly syncretistic: a mixture of Roman Catholicism and native Amerindian beliefs and practices (animism).

Some of the most famous Catholic clerics were Dominican friar Bartolomé de las Casas who defended the rights of the Indians in Chiapas during the 1500s; Dominican friar Pedro de la Peña who was the first professor of theology at the University of Mexico, founded in 1553, and who later became the Bishop of Quito, Ecuador; Franciscan friar Juárez Serra who established a

chain of missions to evangelize and domesticate the Indians in Alta California during the 1700s. Father Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, a parish priest of Dolores, raised the standard of revolt against Spain on 16 September 1810; he marched against the capital with an ill-assorted, badly armed company of Indians; but he was defeated, captured and executed on 30 July 1811. Father José María Morelos, a parish priest of Carácuaro, led the liberation of much of southern Mexico from Spanish control, drafted a constitution calling for fair land distribution and racial equality; he was captured and executed by Spanish forces in 1815. Bishop Samuel Ruíz García of the Diocese of San Bartolomé de las Casas in Chiapas worked for four decades (1959-2000) to defend the human rights of the poor and the Amerindian population, and he played a fundamental role in peace negotiations between the Mexican government and the Zapatista National Liberation Army during the 1990s; he retired in 2000 at age 75.

Although the Mexican Episcopal Conference of the Catholic Church prohibits its clergy from joining political parties or becoming political leaders, it also states that priests have a responsibility to denounce actions that violate Christian morality. In 1992, under the administration of President Carlos Salinas (PRI), constitutional reforms were approved that officially recognized churches of all religious groups, restored land ownership rights to the Catholic Church, allowed for the wearing of Catholic vestments and robes in public, authorized the teaching of religion in private schools, and gradually restored diplomatic relations between the Vatican and the Mexican government.

Nevertheless, tensions between the Church and the State continued, especially in southern Mexico. Local government officials, PRI party leaders and large landowners accused Bishop Samuel Ruíz of the city of San Cristóbal de las Casas of supporting the Zapatista rebellion that began in Chiapas in 1994, which the Bishop Ruiz strongly denied. In addition, Vatican officials accused Bishop Ruíz of “theological and pastoral distortions” due to his support for an “Indian Theology,” which they associated with the Marxist-inspired Theology of Liberation. Nevertheless, the Zapatista rebels insisted that Bishop Ruíz continue to serve as a mediator in their negotiations with the federal government.

Roman Catholicism in Mexico is extremely varied in practice. It ranges from those who support traditional folk religious practices (known as “popular Catholicism”), especially in isolated rural communities (such as those in Chiapas), to those who are advocates of the Theology of Liberation, and from those who are active in Catholic Charismatic prayer groups to others who participate in the conservative Opus Dei movement. There are a variety of layman’s groups with different goals, purposes and political orientations in contemporary Mexico. The largest and best known include the following: Mexican Catholic Action, Knights of Columbus, Cursillo Movement, Christian Family Movement, as well as a variety of university student and workers’ organizations.

Throughout Mexico today there are many Catholic shrines and sacred places – such as caves, grottos, lakes, rivers, lagoons, crossroads, hills, and mountains – that were sacred for the Amerindians who inhabited the region prior to Spanish colonization. Many of these places were later clothed with Catholic symbols and renamed in honor of the Virgin Mary, the Christ Child, or a Catholic saint.

Special celebrations are held annually in honor of the Virgin Mary, Christ and Christian saints at many places in Mexico. Three of the most important shrines are those dedicated to “La Virgen de Juquila” in the State of Oaxaca, to “Nuestro Señor Jesucristo y San Miguel de las Cuevas de Chalma” in the State of Mexico, and to “La Virgen de Guadalupe” in the Federal District. In addition, there are a variety of “folk saints” in Mexico that have not been canonized by the Catholic Church but that are treated as sacred by many believers. In many ways the belief

in folk saints allows for a sort of cafeteria-style Catholicism that incorporates healing (physical, emotional and spiritual), spiritualism (via mediums who allegedly channel spiritual beings) and shamanism (magic and witchcraft) just like other practitioners claim to do in the modern New Age movement.

One of the most popular folk saints is José Fidencio Síntora Constantino, known as *El Niño Fidencio*, who was born in 1898 in the State of Guanajuato (central region). He became known to the Mexican press in 1928, which coincided with a period of turmoil known as the Cristero War (1926-1929), when Catholics were persecuted during the administration of President Plutarco Elías Calles. *El Niño Fidencio*, who is popularly identified with the Christ Child, is reported to have received his calling as a child and later, as a young man, he received the gift of healing and achieved fame as a *curandero*, using herbal remedies to allegedly cure the sick from a variety of ailments. In 1921, at age 23, he moved to Espinazo, a small town in the State of Nuevo León, located near the large city of Monterrey. There, he is said to have employed a variety of healing methods and his cures were sometimes quite unorthodox, such as rolling people in the dirt to heal them and getting the mentally ill to swing in circles in a giant swing that he invented; he sometimes performed surgery using shards of glass and claimed that his gift had come from God. His followers claim that Fidencio had numerous supernatural experiences, such as revelations and visions, which added to his notoriety. At the height of his popularity during the 1930s, Fidencio led a colony of about 10,000 followers in Espinazo who praised his healing ability, whereas his detractors accused him of being a spiritualist medium and using magic (witchcraft) to deceive people. A small army of faithful followers, called the Red Brigade, protected Fidencio from constant attacks by the press, the medical community, the government and those associated with the Catholic Church. After Fidencio's death in 1938, he continued to have a great cult following, especially in northern Mexico and southwestern USA. Yearly, thousands of believers travel to the village of Espinazo to call on his spirit and seek similar cures and miraculous manifestations.

Another folk saint that has been popularized throughout Mexico is “La Santa Muerte.” Her larger-than-life statue, which devotees keep in glass boxes at road-side sanctuaries, is usually draped in lace-trimmed satin; her hooded, grinning skull is crowned with a rhinestone tiara, and her bony fingers that protrude from beneath her cloak are adorned with glittering rings. Stories of prayers answered and miracles performed have fueling the spread of this popular cult, whose worship is said to date back only a generation among rural villages in the mid-1960s. Prisoners, petty thieves, corrupt policemen and powerful drug traffickers are believed to be devotees of *La Santa Muerte*, who appeals to the faith of simple working-class Mexicans who daily face hunger, injustice, corruption and crime in some of Mexico's toughest neighborhoods.

Yearly, there is a special celebration in honor of the dead, called “*Culto a los Muertos*,” which is celebrated from October 21 to November 2. In many villages, towns and cities across the country, Mexican peasants bring a variety of offerings – flowers, food, drink, candles, etc. – to a family altar in their homes or to the graveside of their dead relatives, and there is a celebration with music, dances, masks and other symbols of death, and fireworks in their honor.

The Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR) has been a source of spiritual revitalization for many Catholics. The “Centro de Renovación del Altílo,” located at the monastery of San José del Altílo in the Coyoacán district of southern Mexico City, led by **Friar Alfonso Navarro Castellanos** of the Congregation of Missionaries of the Holy Spirit (*Congregación de Misioneros del Espíritu Santo*, MSpSC), became the major center of the CCR movement in Mexico. Friar Navarro was born in Guadalajara, Mexico, in October of 1935. He joined the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit and was ordained to the priesthood in 1962. He earned a doctorate in philosophy from

the University of Fribourg in Switzerland and an advanced degree in theology in Rome. As a young priest, he was present during the opening of the Second Vatican Council. Following his time in Europe, he taught philosophy and theology at various seminaries in Mexico and Peru. Beginning in 1971, he was assigned the post of Secretary of the General Commission for Pastoral Work for his religious order. He also began his role as leader of the CCR in Mexico during that year.

Beginning in the 1980s, Navarro conducted seminars on missionary and pastoral work, called **SINE (Systematic Integral New Evangelization)**, for many parishes and dioceses in the USA, Latin America and Europe. SINE has had a tremendous impact upon many lives, families and parishes by helping Catholics to realize that evangelization is the essential mission of the Church and of their everyday lives. Friar Navarro, a pioneer in Catholic evangelization and the CRM, died of a heart attack at age 67 in June 2003.

Currently, the Roman Catholic Church in Mexico is divided administratively into 15 regions and 22 jurisdictions: 14 archdioceses, five territorial prelatures, two eparchy and one apostolic exarchate: *Nuestra Señora de los Mártires del Libano en México* (Maronite Eparchy, about 148,250 adherents), *Nuestra Señora del Paraíso en México* (Greek-Melkite Eparchy, about 4,600 adherents), *America Latina e Messico, Faithful of the Oriental Rite* (Armenian Apostolic Exarchate, about 12,000 adherents).

The Mexican Episcopal Conference is composed of 157 members (the papal nuncio, cardinals, archbishops and bishops) and presided by Mons. Carlos Aguiar Retes, the Archbishop of Tlalnepantla. The Archbishop of Mexico City (Federal District) is Cardinal Norberto Rivera Carrera, who was appointed Archbishop in June 1995 and elevated to Cardinal in 1998.

The Protestant Movement

After the Constitution of 1857 formalized Liberal reforms, which limited the power of the Roman Catholic Church and broadened individual freedoms, the systematic penetration of Protestant groups began in Mexico. **By 1900, at least 15 U.S. Protestant denominations had entered Mexico**, some of which had begun along the U.S.-Mexican border, others on the coastlands (Veracruz), and some in Mexico City and other major cities (Saltillo, Zacatecas, San Luís Potosí, Guadalajara, Puebla, Pachuca and Guanajuato).

One of the first independent missionaries to begin Protestant work along the border was Miss Melinda Rankin (1852 in Brownsville, Texas), a Presbyterian who later joined the American and Foreign Christian Union and established Protestant schools in Matamoros, Tamaulipas (1862-1863), and Monterrey, Nuevo León (1866). The first Protestant church organized in Mexico City was a German Lutheran congregation in 1861. In 1862, an independent Baptist missionary, James Hickey, arrived in Monterrey from Texas and began the task of evangelizing and establishing a church (1864) that was later pastored by Thomas Westrupp. By 1870, there were two Protestant churches in Monterrey, one affiliated with the American Baptist Home Mission Society (Westrupp) and the other related to the American Cumberland Presbyterian Church, pastored by John Parks. In 1868, the Protestant Episcopal Church established a relationship with an independent Catholic church (non-papal), known as the Mexican Church of Jesus, which had been organized in 1859 in Mexico City. By 1870, there were 23 Episcopal-Church of Jesus congregations in the Valley of Mexico.

During the period 1870 to 1900, at least 15 U.S. Protestant mission agencies began work in Mexico. The Society of Friends (Quakers) arrived in Matamoros, Tamaulipas, in 1871, near the Texas border. Three missionary couples affiliated with the Northern Presbyterian Church

arrived in Mexico City in 1872, and eventually began work in Zacatecas, San Luis Potosí and Guanajuato. The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (Congregational Church) sent two missionary couples to Guadalajara in 1872, and five missionary couples were sent to Monterrey in 1873 to work with congregations formed by Melinda Rankin and Juan Sepulveda that grew out of the early Baptist and Presbyterian efforts. In 1872, both the Methodist Episcopal Church (North) and the Methodist Episcopal Church (South) began work in Mexico City, after purchasing from the government properties that formerly belonged to the Catholic Church. In 1874, the Southern Presbyterians began work in Matamoros, Tamaulipas. The Associated Reformed Presbyterian Church arrived in 1878, the Southern Baptist Convention in 1880, the Plymouth Brethren (also known as Christian Brethren) in 1890, the Seventh-Day Baptist General Conference in 1893, and the Christian Women's Board of Missions (Disciples of Christ) in 1895.

Between 1900 and 1949, at least 45 Protestant church bodies or mission agencies were established in Mexico: the Young Men's Christian Association/YMCA (1902), Church of the Nazarene (1903), Peniel Missionary Society (1906, later known as Pilgrim Holiness), Apostolic Church of Faith in Jesus Christ (1914, founded by Mrs. Romana Carbajal de Valenzuela in Villa Aldama, Chihuahua; this is first known Pentecostal group in Mexico, which is a Oneness body), Free Methodist Church (1917), Assemblies of God (1917, founded by Alice Luce and Sunshine Marshall in Monterrey), Swedish Free Mission / Filadelfia Swedish Pentecostal Churches (1919, founded by Axel Andersson), Church of God-Seven Day (1920), Church of God in the Mexican Republic (1920, founded by David Ruesga, a split from the Assemblies of God); Wesleyan Church (1922), Mexican Union Conference of the Seventh-Day Adventists (1923), Reformed Church in America (1924), Spiritual Evangelical Christian Church (1926, founded by Irish Oneness Pentecostal missionary Joseph Stewart), Interdenominational Christian Church (1927, founded by Josué Mejía Hernández in Colonia Portales), Movement of Independent Evangelical Pentecostal Churches / MIEPI (1930, founded by Valente Aponte González [1894-1961] in Colonia Merced Balbuena, Mexico City, DF), Metropolitan Church Association (1930), Church of God / Cleveland, TN (1932, missionary to Sonora María Rivera de Atkinson joined this denomination), America's Keswick (1934), The Salvation Army (1934), Wycliffe Bible Translators (1935, also known as Summer Institute of Linguistics), Universal Pentecostal Church of Jesus (1935, founded in Morelos), Pentecostal Church of God (1942), International Church of the Foursquare Gospel (1943), World Mission Prayer League (1943), Church of God of Prophecy (1944), Churches of Christ in Christian Union (1944, independent Christian Churches and Churches of Christ), Mexican Mission Ministries (1945), Evangelical Covenant Church (1946), Evangelical Methodist Church (1946), Church of God / Anderson-IN (1946), Mission Aviation Fellowship (1946), Pentecostal Holiness Church (1947), Christian Fellowship Union (1947), Missionary Revival Crusade (1949, later known as Calvary Churches / Centers of Faith, Hope and Love (1949), and Air Mail from God (1949, later known as Trans World Missions).

It should be noted that most, if not all, of the Protestant missionaries in Mexico left the country after the beginning of the Revolution in 1910 and did not return until after the conflict ended in 1917. In that year, the mainline U.S. Protestant mission agencies that had begun work in Mexico decided on a "comity" plan, whereby the various agencies were assigned to different geographical areas of the country in an effort to avoid the duplication of efforts, while leaving Mexico City open to all agencies. However, the so-called "Cincinnati Plan" did not work out well in practice, as most Mexican denominational leaders, pastors and their church members refused to switch denominational alliances to comply with the plan.

There are many Pentecostal churches and denominations in Mexico that trace their origins to the work begun by the **Swedish Free Mission / Filadelfia Swedish Pentecostal Churches**, founded by Axel and Ester Andersson in San Luis Potosí in 1919 and in Coyoacán (a suburb of Mexico City) in 1921, who was later assisted by other Swedish missionaries, such as Charles Armstrong and Gunhild Gustaffson. The Swedish Pentecostals were led by the Rev. Lewi Petrus (1884-1974), who pastored the Filadelfia Church in Stockholm, which in 1929 was reported to be the largest Pentecostal church in the world with 3,540 members. In Mexico, by March 1937, there were nine established churches and 47 preaching points, with more than 4,000 members. According to Manuel Gaxiola, Lindy Scott and other sources, the Mexican denominations that grew out of this movement include the following: the Independent Evangelical Church in Mexico (IEIM), the Independent Evangelical Church in the Mexican Republic (IEIRM), the Independent Pentecostal Christian Church (ICIP), the Independent Pentecostal Fraternity (FRAPI – composed of eight autonomous church associations: Bethel Church of Tacubaya, Iglesia Siloé, Iglesia Emanuel, Iglesia Ebenezer, Iglesia Belén, Iglesia Getsemaní, Iglesia Filadelfia, and Iglesia Bethel Elyon and their affiliated churches), among others.

Between 1950 and 1980, another 94 Protestant mission agencies began work in Mexico, and scores of new denominations came into existence under national leadership. During the 1940s and 1950s there were many reports of the severe persecution of evangelicals by fanatical Catholics, especially in rural areas and within Amerindian communities. Historically, the states with the greatest religious intolerance and opposition to Protestant efforts have been Hidalgo, Guerrero, Michoacán, Oaxaca and Chiapas. The Assemblies of God alone reported 59 violent deaths of their church members in 1946 due to machete attacks, beatings, stoning and firearms. Others were threatened, beaten and forced to leave their villages because they had become evangelicals. In 1951, the Assemblies of God reported that 30 evangelicals were martyred for refusing to return to Roman Catholicism. Many evangelical children and youth have suffered persecution from Catholic teachers and students in public schools. More recently, incidents of persecution against evangelicals have been reported during the 1990s and 2000s.

Harassment of Christians in Mexico

Christians in the states of Oaxaca, Guerrero and Chiapas have been subject to harassment by their community and officials. The persecution ranges from difficulty in everyday life, to illegal imprisonment, destruction of buildings and physical threats.

June 28, 1999, Chiapas, Meeting held between Protestant representatives and state government officials regarding the persecution of Protestants by caciques. Protestants seek reconciliation in contrast to previous attempts at legal retribution.

July 1, 1999, Chiapas, Reports that in some villages caciques are producing documents which state that “no one in this village will change their religion,” coercing villagers to sign them, and then using them as “legal” grounds to expel any Protestants.

Evangelical Christians in Chiapas have borne the brunt of much of the lawlessness there. They are frequently expelled from their homes and villages because they refuse to drink alcohol or to participate in local syncretistic festivities where large amounts of alcohol are consumed. The powerful local leaders, or caciques, who control the alcohol industry fear a considerable decrease of their earnings and see these Christians as threat to their power. The village authorities often expel the Protestants or threaten them with arrest or other abuse. Catholic Christians or authorities who speak out against the expulsions have also been driven away.

“The general repression in Chiapas hits also many Catholic Christians. The main cause for this re-

pression lies in the fact that power is held mainly by the caciques and the big landowners and the local wine and alcohol dealers. The persecution of the Protestant Christians can also be brought in connection with this fact: For religious reasons they refuse to drink alcohol. The liquor dealers are afraid of a loss of sales of their goods. Therefore they arrange the expulsion of the Christians.”

– As described by Mr. B. Ruiz

The expelled villagers, mostly subsistence farmers, have to leave behind their entire harvest and all their breeding cattle in their villages. Under threat of death, they are hindered from returning to their homes - not even to gather their harvests. Guards are often posted in front of their former houses to prevent their return. From that point on the expelled families are often forced to earn their living as street vendors. Many of the village authorities still refuse to admit that there have been expulsions. Even a leading representative of the regional parliament declared that, “If such expulsions had taken place they would not have to be considered as crimes anyways.” The government’s approach may change now that an evangelical Christian, Pablo Salazar, has been elected governor of Chiapas.

Overall human rights situation

The constitutional protection of religious liberty is generally respected in the north, central and urban areas of Mexico, however, in the rural areas, the caciques have enormous influence on the application of laws. Amnesty International reports that the situation has deteriorated significantly and arbitrary detentions, torture, extra-judicial killings and disappearances have become widespread. The government in many cases seems unwilling or unable to enforce the rule of law. Indeed, human rights monitors are under constant threat of death and peaceful peasant demonstrations in support of much-needed land reform are often broken up by force. Mexican police and security forces frequently target their political opponents, as well as human rights activists, for arbitrary arrest, torture and execution.

Source: <http://www.cswusa.com/Countries/Mexico.htm>

During the 1960s and 1970s, the **Charismatic Renewal Movement (CRM)** began and flourished in Mexico. An ecumenical bridge between Catholics and Protestants in Latin America in the late 1970s and early 1980s was the John 17:21 Fellowship associated with David du Plessis. A Latin American branch of this Fellowship was established in Guatemala City after a major earthquake occurred there in 1976; the coordinator was the Rev. Robert Thomas of Los Altos, California. In Mexico, Thomas worked closely with Friar Alfonso Navarro Castellanos and the Catholic Missionaries of the Holy Spirit (MSPSC) to form UCELAM (Christian Union for Evangelizing Latin America) in 1978, which held annual ecumenical CRM conferences in Mexico City for a decade or more. Some of the UCELAM teams included Evangelicals such as Bob Thomas, Paul Northrup (secretary of the Latin American John 17:21 Fellowship), Bill Finke and Juan Carlos Ortiz (an early leader in the Argentine CRM between 1967 and 1978), who spoke to many ecumenical audiences in the USA and Latin America during the 1980s.

Bill Finke was an independent Pentecostal missionary trained in the Assemblies of God Bible College in Seattle, WA. In 1972, while living in Chilpancingo, Mexico, Finke purchased a new Cessna 210 Turbo-charged six-passenger aircraft to facilitate his ministry. Between 1972 and 1979 Finke taught and trained Catholic bishops, priests, nuns and lay workers throughout Mexico and other parts of Latin America as part of his CRM-related activities.

Between 1980 and 1995, another 67 Protestant missions and service agencies were established in Mexico. Statistics on the various Protestant denominations in Mexico at any point in time has been difficult for most researchers and church historians to find. One of the first sources of information about this was *The Missionary Review of the World* (May 1911, Vol. XXIV), which reported 469 organized local churches with 16,250 members in 1888. In 1910, another source reported 23,940 baptized Protestant church members in Mexico: Methodists (12,500),

Presbyterians (5,700), Baptists (2,630), Congregationalists (1,540), Christian Churches-Disciples of Christ (900), and Quakers (670).

However, in 1936, the total membership of these same denominations was reported to be 22,882, which reflects some of the difficulties encountered during the Mexican Revolution and the Depression years. Nevertheless, some of the newer denominations reported the following membership statistics in 1936: Assemblies of God (6,000), Adventists (4,000), Swedish Pentecostals (4,000), Nazarenes (2,000), Pentecostal Holiness (1,300), Pilgrim Holiness (1,200), and Mexican Indian Churches (560), for a total of about 19,000 members. These are partial statistics because other denominations (with an estimated total of 6,000 members) were known to exist in 1936 that were not included in the study published by the International Missionary Council in 1938. The total Protestant membership in Mexico for 1936 was estimated to be 48,000 but did not include the Mennonite colonies.

Today, there are an estimated 80,000 **Mennonites** (adherents) in Mexico. They live in several areas, particularly in the states of Chihuahua and Durango. About 50,000 Mennonites reside near the city of Cuauhtémoc in Chihuahua. In Durango, there are 32 Mennonite communities (30 in the Municipality of Nuevo Ideal and two in the Municipality of Santiago Papasquiari). Mennonites in Durango number about 7,000, with most of them living in Nuevo Ideal, which is located about 124 km north of Durango City. In 2006, the largest Mennonite denominations were the *Altkolonier Mennonitengemeinde* with 17,200 members; the *Kleingemeinde in Mexiko* with 2,150 members; the *Sommerfelder Mennonitengemeinde* with 2,043 members; and the *Reinländer-Gemeinde* with 1,350 members. In 2006, there were a total of about 26,000 Mennonite church members in Mexico.

During the 1920s, the Mexican government desired to settle the barren northern region with industrious farmers such as the Mennonites. In 1922, at the invitation of President Alvaro Obregón, 20,000 Mennonites left Canada and settled in the State of Chihuahua. The Mexican government agreed to sell them land at reasonable prices and level no taxes for 100 years if the Mennonites would produce the bulk of cheese needed for northern Mexico. President Obregón granted the Mennonites full control of their schools including maintenance of their language, independence of religion in both home and schools, and exemption from military service.

Canadian Mennonites began arriving in Chihuahua in 1922, loaded with livestock, farm equipment and household goods, intending to reproduce their industrious farms in Chihuahua as their forefathers had done on the prairies of Canada. A total of 20,000 Mennonites arrived in 1922 in a mass migration beginning in March 1922. Over a four-year period, a total of 36 trains of 25-45 cars made the journey from Canada to Mexico carrying the settlers and their farm equipment. A total of 200,000 acres (810 km²) was obtained by Mennonites from the Mexican Government. They invested large amounts of capital in farming and transformed desolated stretches of sand and cactus into prosperous farms. They maintained well-equipped machine shops, large farm buildings and motorized transportation, although Mennonites prohibited the ownership of automobiles for common use.

In a few short years, the Mennonites had built a series of some forty villages surrounded by fields of green pastures and major crops including wheat, Canadian oats, beans, corn and apples. Their livestock were considered superior to native stock, easily recognizable by their sleek, well-fed appearance. Their villages reflected architectural styles existing in Russia and Canada, and the village names were the same as they had used in Canada: Rosenort, Steinback, Schonwiese, and so forth. The Mennonites founded independent congregational groups of villages and formed three colonies: the Manitoba Colony, the Swift Current Colony and the Santa Clara Colony.

By 1962, there were about 276,000 Protestant church members in Mexico, according to a study conducted by Dr. Donald McGavran; however, there was no mention of the Mennonite colonists. At that time, the largest denominational families were the following: Presbyterian (42,000), Methodist (33,000), Adventist (22,700), Church of God (Cleveland, TN - 15,500), Swedish Pentecostals (15,000), Assemblies of God (15,000), Movement of Independent Evangelical Pentecostal Churches (*Movimiento Iglesia Evangélica Pentecostés Independiente-MIEPI*) (10,000), and scores of other groups with less than 10,000 members each.

In 1960, the Mexican national census reported the Protestant population at 578,515, which was represented by about 40 denominations, 2,420 organized congregations, 1,622 mission stations and 2,470 Sunday schools, according to the Read, Monterroso and Johnston study on Protestant church growth, published in 1969. This study reported that the total Protestant membership in Mexico was about 430,000 in 1967, of which 64 percent was Pentecostal and 36 percent non-Pentecostal. Obviously, the number of Pentecostal church members had increased faster than the non-Pentecostals in the 30-year period 1936 and 1966. However, once again, there was no mention of the Mennonite colonists.

The size of the Protestant population in 2000 was 5.7 percent of the total population, compared to 4.9% in 1990, 3.3% in 1980 and 1.8% in 1970, based on statistics from the Mexican national censuses. By comparison, the percentage size of the Protestant population in Mexico is much lower than in the countries of Central America where Protestants are between 15-35 percent of the national population in each country; however, in terms of actual population, the number of Protestants in Mexico is very large, an estimated 6,322,000 in mid-2008, third in size in the Americas after the USA (150 million), Brazil (30 million) and Canada (9.5 million).

According to the government database of registered “religious associations” (ARs) in 2009, there were a total of 7,073 ARs, of which 1,568 were identified as Baptist; 280 Pentecostal; 15 Presbyterian; 10 Holiness; eight Lutheran; six Methodist; and three Mennonite. Overall, there were an estimated 55,000 local Protestant congregations in Mexico in 2009. In 2008, VELA Ministries International, in collaboration with the Bible Society of Mexico and the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, conducted a national study of Evangelical groups (Adventists were excluded) in Mexico and produced a national directory of 22,796 local churches (see sources). Although this study and the resulting database of churches were incomplete due to a lack of cooperation from some denominations and a lack of information from others, the states with the largest number of reported churches were the following: Mexico, 2,571; Veracruz, 2,443; Tabasco, 1,634; Chiapas, 1,492; Chihuahua, 1,317; and Baja California Norte, 1,265. All other states had less than 1,000 churches each. However, in terms of church-to-population ratios by state (total population), the national directory reported that the states with lowest ratios (the most evangelized areas) were: Chihuahua 1:0,706; Tabasco 1:1,208; Chiapas 1:1,648; Yucatán 1:1,901; Campeche 1:2,007; Baja California Norte 1:2,113; Guerrero 1:2,631; Hidalgo 1:2,638; Sonora 1:2,872; and Veracruz 1:2,895. And the states with the highest ratios (least evangelized areas) were: Colima 1:43,219; Guanajuato 1:15,293; Querétaro de Árteaga 1:15,077; Jalisco 1:10,517; and Puebla 1:10,412.

According to the 2000 census, the states with the highest percentage of Protestant population were: Chiapas, 10.4 percent; Mexico, 9.6 percent; Veracruz, 9.6 percent; Federal District (Mexico City proper), 6.3 percent; Nuevo León, 4.8 percent; and Tamaulipas, 4.8 percent. The states within the smallest percentage of Protestant population were: Colima 0.30 percent; Baja California Sur 0.34 percent; Aguascalientes 0.36 percent; Zacatecas 0.52 percent; Nayarit 0.53 percent; Querétaro 0.53 percent; and Tlaxcala 0.55 percent.

Based on information from a variety of sources, the largest Protestant denominations in Mexico today are believed to be the following in order of relative size by membership: **National Council of the Assemblies of God** (more than 5,000 congregations and 650,000 members in 2000); **National Presbyterian Church** (4,800 congregations and 624,000 members in 2008); **SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH** (more than 2,852 congregations and 597,540 members in 2007); **Independent Evangelical Church in Mexico** (IEIM, founded by Swedish Pentecostal Axel Anderson); **Interdenominational Christian Church in the Mexican Republic** (ICIRM, Pentecostal); **National Baptist Convention of Mexico** (more than 1,700 congregations and 272,000 members in 2009); **Church of God in the Mexican Republic** (IDRM, a split from the Assemblies of God); **APOSTOLIC CHURCH OF FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST** (more than 1,400 congregations and 150,000 members in 2008 – Oneness Pentecostal); **Movement of Independent Evangelical Pentecostal Churches** (MIEPI); **CHURCH OF GOD INTERNATIONAL** (CLEVELAND, TENNESSEE); **Spiritual Christian Evangelical Church** (362 churches and 578 preaching centers, with an estimated 62,500 members – Oneness Pentecostal); **METHODIST CHURCH OF MEXICO** (400 congregations and 52,000 members in 2006); **Church of the Nazarene** (616 churches and 40,000 members in 2008); **Centers of Faith, Hope and Love of the Missionary Revival Crusade** (245 centers, some of which have over 10,000 members each - Pentecostal); **Independent Pentecostal Fraternity** (FRAPI); **Independent Evangelical Church in the Mexican Republic** (IEIRM, Swedish Pentecostal, a split from IEIM); **National Evangelical Pentecostal Church** (INEP), **Universal Pentecostal Church of Jesus** (in Morelos, Guerrero and Veracruz); and independent **Christian Churches / Churches of Christ** (affiliated with Churches of Christ in Christian Union).

In 2000, VELA Ministries published a study of all known Protestant denominations (Adventist-related groups were excluded) in the Mexico City Metro Area (MCMA: the DF and 20 continuous urban municipalities in the State of Mexico), which revealed the following information (see table below).

**TABLE OF THE LARGEST PROTESTANT DENOMINATIONS
IN THE MEXICO CITY METRO AREA (MCMA) IN 2000**

	DENOMINATION NAME	CHURCHES & MISSIONS	BAPTIZED MEMBERS
1	*Iglesia Cristiana Independiente Pentecostal (ICIP)	115	16,500
2	Convención Nacional Bautista de México (CNBM)	176	15,188
3	Concilio Nacional de las Asambleas de Dios (CNAD)	102	13,650
4	Centros de Fe, Esperanza y Amor (CFEA)	18	13,500
5	Iglesia Cristiana Interdenominacional en la República Mexicana (ICIRM)	155	10,688
6	Movimiento de Iglesias Evangélicas Pentecostales Independientes (MIEPI)	125	13,175
7	Iglesia Nacional Presbiteriana de México (INPM)	124	11,025
	Note: The largest seven denominations above had more than twice the number of baptized members as the other seven denominations listed below.		
8	Iglesia de Dios del Séptimo Día (IDSD)	63	5,670

9	Iglesia Metodista de México	56	5,145
10	Vida Nueva para el Mundo (VNM)	2	4,500
11	Comisión Centros Cristianos (CCC)	11	4,125
12	Iglesia de Dios Independiente en la República Mexicana (IDIRM)	44	3,938
13	Iglesia del Nazareno en México (INM)	46	3,825
14	Iglesia de Dios en México Evangelio Completo (IDMEC, affiliated with the Church of God-Cleveland, TN)	45	3,690
	SUBTOTAL	1,082	124,219
15	All other denominations (less than 3,500 members each)	1,517	117,362
	TOTALS	2,599	241,581

Source: VELA. *Metrópolis 2000: Visión Evangélica para el Nuevo Milenio. Estudio del Crecimiento de la Iglesia Evangélica en el Área Metropolitana de la Ciudad de México*. México, DF: Visión Evangelizadora Latinoamericana (VELA), 2000.

*Founded by Swedish Pentecostals under the leadership of Axel Anderson.

Notes:

1. The Seventh-Day Adventist Church and associated denominations were not included in this study.
2. Average size of "all other denominations" = 77.7 members per church/mission.
3. Average size of largest 14 denominations = 114.8 members per church/mission.

Ecumenical organizations among Protestants in Mexico include: **CONELA-affiliated members** in Mexico are the Secretariat of Social Communication of the Evangelical Christian Church of Mexico (*Secretaría de Comunicación Social de Iglesias Cristianas Evangélicas de México, SECOSICE*); and the Mexican Evangelical Confederation (*Confraternidad Evangélica Mexicana, CONEMEX*), founded in 1982. The only **CLAI members** in Mexico are the German Lutheran Church and the Methodist Church (affiliated with the United Methodist Church in the USA).

Other Religions

Although some of the **non-Protestant Christian Groups** were probably included in the "Protestant-Evangelical" category in the 1990 and 2000 censuses, the two main denominational families are the Jehovah's Witnesses (JWs) and the Mormons. The official 2005 Report of Jehovah's Witnesses Worldwide listed 11,192 congregations with a peak attendance of 593,802 in Mexico. The 2000 Mexican census reported 1,057,736 JW adherents, which means that the JWs in Mexico are the second-largest worldwide to JWs in the USA.

The various Mormon groups that exist in Mexico today include: the **Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints** (Utah Mormons first arrived in the Casas Grandes Valley of Chihuahua in 1885 and eventually established nine agricultural colonies: six in the state of Chihuahua and three in Sonora; in February 2000, the Utah Mormons dedicated a new temple in Juárez to serve its 25,000 members in that state), the **Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints** (Missouri Mormons, now called The Community of Christ), the **Church of the Firstborn in the Fullness of Times** (known as the LeBaron Mormon polygamist movement,

arrived in Chihuahua in 1922), **Church of Christ Temple Lot** (Illinois Mormons), **United Order Front** (Utah-Arizona Mormons), and the **Apostolic United Brethren** (a split from the United Order Front). The 2000 Mexican census reported a total of 205,229 adherents for all Mormon groups, whereas the official Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints website reported 1,158,236 members in 1,977 congregations for 2007.

Also present in Mexico are the **Children of God** (now called "The Family"), the **Christadelphian Bible Mission**, **Christian Science** (Church of Christ, Scientist), **Growing in Grace Ministries International** (based in Miami, FL), **Mita Congregation** (from Puerto Rico), the **People of Amos Church** (a split from Mita Congregation under Nicolas Tosado Aviles in Puerto Rico), **Voice of the Cornerstone** (a Branham-related group from Puerto Rico), the **God is Love Pentecostal Church** and the **Universal Church of the Kingdom of God** (both from Brazil), among others.

Another significant religious tradition, founded in the city of Monterrey, Nuevo León, in 1926 by Eusebio Joaquín González (known as the Prophet Aarón, who died in 1964), has blended Mexican mysticism with Pentecostal fervor to create The **Light of the World Church** (its full name is the "Church of the Living God, Column and Pillar of Truth, Jesus The Light of the World"). Since 1952 its headquarters have been located in Colonia Hermosa Provincia, Guadalajara, State of Jalisco. The Prophet Aarón was considered by his followers to be "the voice of God on earth." Church officials claim that this denomination grew from 80 members in 1929, to 75,000 in 1972, to 1.5 million in 1986, and to about four million members in 22 countries in 1990. However, the 2000 Mexican census only reported 69,254 Light of the World Church adherents in Mexico, which also may include some of the following related groups.

In 1942, The Light of the World Church experienced a division that led to the founding of the **Church of the Good Shepherd** (*Iglesia del Buen Pastor*), led by José María González, with headquarters in Toluca de Lerdo, capital of the State of Mexico. Similar to the mother church, this denomination holds an annual celebration of the Lord's Supper (Communion) in April during Holy Week with the participation of pastors and lay representatives from all of its local congregations in Mexico, the USA, and Central America.

In 1965, Abel Joaquín Avelar, a son of Eusebio Joaquín (the Prophet Aarón), left the Light of the World Church in Guadalajara, moved to Mexico City and founded his own organization, the **Church of Jesus Christ** (*Iglesia de Jesucristo*), which now has at least 22 organized churches. The leader of this denomination has taken the title "Apostle of the Church" and has an "Apostolic Council" composed of 12 members.

The **Christian Apostolic Church of the Living God, Column and Pillar of Truth** was founded in 1978 in Cuernavaca, Morelos, by Francisco Jesus Adame Giles, who claimed to have a dream or vision in 1978 in which he reported that "an angel appeared to me and called me to preach the Gospel and announce the Kingdom of God." In 1989 he formed a community of followers in Colonia Lomas de Chamilpa on about 25,000 square meters of land, north of Cuernavaca, with himself as the maximum authority. This community of an estimated 400 families is now called *Provincia Jerusalén*; its members are prohibited from smoking, drinking, dancing and women may not use makeup, jewelry or slacks. Adame has a dominant role in their lives—spiritually, socially and economically; this group claims to be neither Protestant nor a sect, but rather "Israelites of the New Israel of God." The movement claims to have about 50,000 followers in the states of Morelos, Oaxaca, Veracruz, Guerrero, México, Puebla, Guanajuato and Baja California Norte.

Independent Western Roman Catholic-derived groups include the following religious associations (ARs):

- **Mexican National Catholic Church**, founded in the 1920s, is an independent nationalistic Catholic Church was organized following the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1917 under Bishops José Joaquín Pérez y Budar, Antonio Benicio López Sierra and Macario López y Valdez.
- **Colonia La Nueva Jerusalén** was founded in 1973 in Michoacán by excommunicated Catholic priest Nabor Cárdenas Mejorada, known as “Papa Nabor” by his followers, in a village about 130 km from the state capital (municipality of Turicato). Cárdenas has been called the “Patriarch of the Mexican Taliban” by the news media because of his authoritarian control of this secluded and tightly-guarded community of believers, who are devoted to “La Virgen del Rosario” (The Virgin of the Rosary) and who believe that the Virgin speaks to them through special messengers. The original messenger was Gabina Romero Sánchez – an illiterate old woman who said that she saw the Virgin at this site in 1973; she died in 1980 – and more recently through “don Agapito” who also communicates with “a spirit named Oscar” who allegedly transmits instructions and warnings from the Virgin. The chapel of the Virgin of the Rosary must be attended to by believers 24 hours a day and 365 days a year out of fear that, if not attended to, “God will discharge His anger against all humanity.” The leadership of the community rejects the changes made by the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s and continues to celebrate Mass in Latin, warning followers of the “immanent end of the world” when fire will destroy all of mankind, except for those living in “The New Jerusalem” in this fertile valley known as “The Holy Land.” An estimated 5,000 followers dress in long robes and women cover their heads with scarves and all modern conveniences are prohibited; drinking alcohol is prohibited and having children is discouraged because the “end of the world is near.” The patriarch of the colony, “Papa Nabor,” is now in his 90s and no one is sure what will happen to the community after he dies.
- **The Mexican Apostolic Catholic Church** (*Iglesia Católica Apostólica Mexicana*), also known as the “**Church of Mr. President**” (*Iglesia del Señor Presidente*), was founded in 1979 in Mexico City by excommunicated Catholic Bishop Eduardo Dávila de la Garza as an independent Mexican Apostolic Church. This church does not recognize the Pope, rather it claims that the President of the Republic of Mexico is its highest authority—that is, it is submissive to the civil authorities. Until his death in 1985, Bishop Dávila continued to ordain priests for ministry within his organization. The basic characteristic of this movement is a belief in the miracle of the “hostia sangrante” (“bleeding communion wafer”) that is reported to have taken place in 1978 in the parish of Our Lady of Guadalupe, located in a poor neighborhood on the eastside of Mexico City, under the leadership of priest José Camacho Melo. Camacho took the matter to his immediate superior, Bishop Dávila, who had his reasons for believing the priest. Dávila reported the matter to his superiors in Mexico and to the Vatican, who sometime later ordered him to burn the wafer and forget the whole matter. For failing to obey this order, Dávila and a dozen priests under his supervision were all excommunicated by the Vatican. Dávila proceeded to ordain Camacho as “bishop” and his second-in-command and renamed Camacho’s church the “**Eucharistic Sanctuary of Our Lady of Guadalupe and the Bleeding Wafer**” (*Santuario Eucarístico de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe y la Hostia Sangrante*). In 1991 Camacho was finally arrested by the civil authorities for failing to turn over the church property to officials of the Roman Catholic Church as ordered, even though all church property in Mexico officially belongs to the State; as of November of

2002, Camacho was still free on bail and the fate of the church property was still undecided. This group rejects the reforms approved by the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s.

- **Society of Saint Pius X** (*Fraternidad Sacerdotal San Pío X en México*), Priorato Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, Colonia Santa María La Ribera, Delegación Cuauhtémoc, DF.
- **Our Lady of Guadalupe Apostolic Catholic Church** (*Iglesia Católica Apostólica “Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe”*) was organized in 2001 in Mexico City by Archbishop Kenneth Maley, who is part Shawnee (an American Indian tribe). Previously he was a member of the Community of the Holy Cross for 28 years and a Roman Catholic priest for 32 years; he served as a missionary in Chile and Africa during that time. After leaving the Roman Catholic Church, Maley helped to organize the **Latin American Apostolic Archdiocese of Our Lady of Guadalupe**, which in early 2008 reported affiliated churches in 14 countries and more than 300 priests. Its work in the Americas includes the USA, Mexico, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Chile, Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay, Bolivia and Brazil.
- **The Traditional Mex-USA Catholic Church** is lead by David Romo Millán, a principal leader of the *Iglesia de la Santa Muerte*, who is the self-appointed Bishop of the *Iglesia Católica tradicional Mex-USA*. Jesús Romero Padilla is the guardian of one of the movement’s main sanctuaries, located in Tepito in the Federal District; he is reported to lead processions honoring “La Santa Muerte” in Puebla, Toluca, Veracruz and Oaxaca. In May 2005, the Secretariat of Government revoked the legality of the *Iglesia Católica Tradicional Mex-USA*, allegedly because its leaders had violated the statutes upon which the organization was previously registered with the Office of Religious Associations. The justification given for the government’s decision was that, rather than dedicating itself to the conservation of the Tridentine Mass of the Old Catholic Tradition, the organization promoted the worship of “La Santa Muerte.” However, in July 2009, David Romo announced to the press that he and his followers would build a \$2.8 million temple (sanctuary) for the *Iglesia de la Santa Muerte* in Tepito, DF. The modern version of adoration of “La Santa Muerte” first appeared in 1965 in the State of Hidalgo.
- **The Traditional Catholic Church San Juanita de Los Lagos** (*Iglesia Tradicional Católica San Juanita de Los Lagos*) was registered with the Office of Religious Associations in June 1994, under the leadership of Francisco Ruiz Abarca; its headquarters are in Delegación Gustavo A. Madero in the Federal District.
- **The Traditional Orthodox Apostolic Old Catholic Church** (*Iglesia Católica, Apostólica, Ortodoxa, Antigua Tradicional*) was registered with the Office of Religious Associations in June 1994; its headquarters are in the Municipality of Ecatepec, State of Mexico.
- **Iglesia de Dios Católica Apostólica Nacional Mexicana Independiente** was founded in Acapulco, State of Guerrero, by Rodolfo Ortiz Peralta.

Eastern Orthodox jurisdictions in Mexico include the following:

- The **Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Mexico and Central America** (Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople) was founded in 1996 in Mexico and is led by Arzobispo Atenagoras (Anesti); Catedral Ortodoxa Griega Santa Sofía, Colonia Lomas Hipódromo, Naucalpan, Estado de México; this jurisdiction is also known as **Sacro Arzobispado Ortodoxo Griego de México** (Greek Orthodox Holy Mission).

- The **Eastern Orthodox Catholic Church** (*Iglesia Católica Ortodoxa Oriental*), Archdiocese of the Americas & Diaspora, has a valid priesthood and episcopacy coming from the Syrian and Russian Orthodox successions, and uses the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom with Syriac-Greek Typicon; the church is administered by a Synod of Bishops with headquarters in Cleveland, Ohio; Cyril Cranshaw is the Bishop of Central and South America (includes Mexico).
- **Iglesia Ortodoxa Católica en México, Exarcado de la Iglesia Ortodoxa en América** (Orthodox Church in America / Greek Orthodox), led by Presbyter Desiderio Barrero Sermeño; the Catedral de la Ascensión del Señor is located in Colonia Peñón de los Baños, Delegación Venustiano Carranza, DF.
- The **Antiochian Orthodox Church** (*Iglesia Ortodoxa Antioqueña*) was founded in Mexico in 1943 under the leadership of Mr. Amín Aboumrad who reported to Archbishop Samuel David in Toledo, Ohio; St. George's Orthodox Cathedral was built in Colonia Roma Sur, Delegación Alvaro Obregón, DF, between 1944 and 1947; in 1966 Antonio Chedraui became the first bishop of Mexico, and in 1996 he was appointed as the Metropolitan Archbishop of Mexico, Venezuela, Central America and the Caribbean.
- **Iglesia Católica Apostólica Ortodoxa del Patriarcado de Moscú** (Russian Orthodox of Moscow); Parroquia de la Protección de La Santa Madre de Dios, Napatla, Estado de México.
- **Iglesia Ortodoxa Rusa del Extranjero** (Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia-ROCOR, Patriarch of Moscow), under Archbishop Kyrill, Western Diocese of North America; Sacrosanto Asceterio de la Santísima Trinidad, Mexico City, DF (Revdo.+Nektariy, Dean).
- **Iglesia Ortodoxa Ucraniana del Patriarca Moisés de Kiev** (Ukrainian Orthodox Church), Arquidiócesis de México y Toda Latinoamérica, under Arzobispo Daniel de Jesús (Ruiz Flores); Parroquia de Nuestro Señor - Metokion de San Serafín de Sarov, Colonia 19 de septiembre, Ecatepec, Estado de México.
- **Iglesia Católica Apostólica Ortodoxa** was founded in Xochistlahuaca, State of Guerrero, by Presbyter José Manuel Ojeda Alonso.
- **Catedral Católica Apostólica Ortodoxa Independiente Mexicana de San Pascual Bailón** was founded by Bishop José de Jesús León Aguilar in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, State of Chiapas.
- **Iglesia Ortodoxa Copta de Alejandría** (Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria) under Patriarca Shenouda III; Mexican headquarters in Tlayacapan, State of Morelos.

Non-Christian religions in Mexico include at least 60 registered religious associations that represent the following traditions: Judaism, Islam, Baha'i Faith, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikh, Sant Mat, Chinese religions and Shinto. Some of these organization are: Centro Budista de la Ciudad de México, Casa Tibet México, Organización Espiritual Mundial Thakar Singh; Eckankar de México; Iglesia del Señor Chaitanya / Sri Chaintanya Saraswat Ashram de Mexico; Sukyo Mahikari México; Soka Gakkai de México; Sociedad Internacional Para la Conciencia de Krishna en México, Movimiento Hare Krishna-Iskcon; Jodo Shinshu Hongwanji-Ha Misión de México; Jodo Shinshu Hongwanji-Ha Ekoji de México; Centro Zen de México; Movimiento del Sendero Interno del Alma (Movement of Spiritual Inner Awareness, MSIA).

Marranos are **Jews** who publicly converted to Christianity to avoid persecution in Spain but who retained their Jewish identity in private. They accompanied the Spaniards into Mexico

in the 16th century; however, the present Jewish community was largely built upon migration from the USA early in the 20th century. The community was further enlarged by Jews from England and Germany, and two small groups from Syria, one from Damascus and a strict Orthodox group from Aleppo. The Jewish community in Mexico, one of the largest in Latin America, numbered 45,260 according to the 2000 census, with an estimated 22,000 Jews in Mexico City (DF), many of whom live in Delegación Miguel Hidalgo and Delegación Cuauhtémoc. The following Jewish religious associations are known to exist: **Religión Judía de México** (Delegación Cuauhtémoc, DF), **Comunidad Ashkenazi de México** (Delegación Cuauhtémoc, DF), **Comunidad Sefaradí** (Delegación Cuauhtémoc, DF), **Centro Comunitario Nadjel Israel** (Colonia Condesa, Delegación Cuauhtémoc, DF), **Comunidad Bet-El de México** (Colonia Polanco, Delegación Miguel Hidalgo, DF), **Comunidad Maguen David** (Colonia Polanco, Delegación Miguel Hidalgo, DF), **Beth Israel Community Center** (Colonia Lomas Chapultepec, Delegación Miguel Hidalgo, DF), **Sociedad de Beneficencia Alianza Monte Sinaí** (Naucalpan, State of Mexico), **Comunidad Israelita de Guadalajara** (Guadalajara, State of Jalisco), **Centro Israelita de Monterrey** (Monterrey, State of Nuevo León), and **Centro Comunitario Ramat Shalom** (Tecamachalco, State of Puebla).

Although **Muslims** migrated to Mexico throughout the 20th century, it was not until the 1980s that organized Islamic worship became visible. In 1995 Mark (Omar) Weston, a convert to Islam, opened the **Islamic Cultural Center** in Mexico City as a meeting place for the Muslim community. Dozens of other small Islamic groups are known to exist throughout the country.

The **Ancient Wisdom Tradition** is represented by **Freemasonry**, **Servants of Light School of Occult Science**, **Rosicrucians** (Ancient & Mystical Order of the Rosae Crucis, AMORC; Fraternitas Rosicruciana Antigua, FRA; Rosicrucian Fellowship), the **Grand Universal Fraternity** (headquarters in El Limon, Aragua, Venezuela), **GFU Network** (led by Jose Manuel Estrada Vásques, with headquarters in Morelos, Mexico), the **Universal Gnostic Movement of Mexico** (founded by Victor Manuel Gómez Rodríguez, known as “Samael Aun Weor” after 1956, with headquarters in Mexico City), the **International Gnostic Movement** (headquarters in Guadalajara, Mexico), the **Universal Christian Gnostic Church**, the **Gnostic Movement Cultural Association**, the **Quetzalcoatl Cultural Institute of Psycho-Analytical Anthropology** (Loreto, Zacatecas, Mexico), the **New Acropolis Cultural Association**, the **Cafh Foundation**, **Wicca** and the **International Pagan Federation of Mexico**. Also, a variety of **Satanist** groups are known to exist in Mexico.

The **Psychic-Spiritualist-New Age tradition** includes 27 **Spiritualist** associations, several **Theosophical** groups, the **Church of Scientology**, the **Unification Church** (Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity, among others. A Mexican national religious tradition, with at least 47 registered associations, blends Catholicism with Spiritualism (communication with the dead through the use of mediums and séances): the **Marian Trinitarian Spiritualist Church**, founded by Roque Jacinto Rojas Esparza (1812-1869) in Mexico City in 1866. Rojas allegedly received a message from the biblical prophet Elijah (*Elías* in Spanish), who named him “the prophet of the First Period.” After Rojas death in 1869, the movement split into several factions; these groups are known today as the **Prophet Elijah (Elias) movement** (with at least 47 registered religious associations in 2009).

“**Popular religiosity**” (**syncretistic**) is practiced by a majority of the Hispanic population, which is also present among numerous **Amerindian religions (animist)** that have blended elements of Catholicism to create several varieties of popular religiosity. The Amerindian groups are scattered throughout the national territory, with the largest concentration in the State of Oaxaca in southern Mexico. Religious shrines, images and sacred places form part of the

religious landscape in Mexico, some of which are dedicated to the Virgin Mary (“la Virgen de Guadalupe”), the Christ Child, the Black Christ, Saint Death (“La Santa Muerte”) and revered “**folk saints and healers,**” such as the Niño Fidencio cult (José Fidencio Sintora Constantino, 1898-1938) in Guanajuato, and the Juan Soldado cult (Juan Castillo Morales) in Baja California.

A revitalization movement among Amerindian tribes in the northern and central regions of Mexico (along the western Sierra Madre mountain range) is called the **Peyote religion**, due to its use of the peyote cactus, which is a psychotropic plant that produces “altered states of consciousness” during shamanic rituals. According to authoritative sources, this practice dates to about 7,000 BCE in Mexico. The **Native American Church of Itzachilatlan** was founded by Aurelio Dias Tepankai in Yoricostio, Michoacán. Similar religious organizations exist in the USA, which have blended Christianity with the Peyote religion, such as the Native American Church in North America with headquarters in Box Elder, Montana.

Among the Afro-American population, elements of African-derived religions from the Caribbean may exist, such as Vodou (Haiti), Santería (Puerto Rico and Cuba), Myalism-Obeah, Rastafarianism, etc. (British West Indies).

The Inter-Religious Council of Mexico was founded in Mexico City in 1992 with representatives from the following traditions: Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Mormon, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, Jewish and Sufi-Muslim. In 1999, the coordinator of the council was Jonathan Rose, the Jewish representative.

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