Volume 3, Issue 1 (May 2026)
ISSN 3049-9704

Journal of Religion and Public Life

Journal of Religion and Public Life
Volume 3, Issue 1 (May 2026)
DOI: https://doi.org/10.70600/jrpl.v3i1.004

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Toward a Cyclical Missional Model of Spiritual Formation in Latin America

J. Omar Palafox [1]

Abstract: Latin American churches stand at a paradoxical crossroads. Across the region, congregations preach against systemic injustice and welcome migrants, the poor, and the displaced with remarkable warmth. Yet, they often hesitate to risk public solidarity with those same neighbours. I describe and measure this tension as a "solidarity bottleneck." Drawing on a mixed-methods study of 14 pastors from eight countries, I employ a 21-item bilingual survey and thematic analysis of open-ended responses to compare three dimensions of missional formation: conscientisation, solidarity, and hospitality. The data reveal a consistent drop from critical awareness and welcome to advocacy, a gap that pastors themselves attribute to fear of political backlash, even when their intent is simply to name sin and call the church to obedience to Christ, limited organising skills, and competing ministry priorities. To respond to this stall, I propose a cyclical Analyse–Accompany–Assimilate (A-A-A) model in which hospitality does not end the church's mission but sparks new rounds of critical reflection and public Christian witness and discipleship in the life of society. A six-month pilot in five congregations showed a medium increase in solidarity scores, suggesting that when A-A-A rhythms are woven into teaching and leadership, Latin American churches can sustain a Spirit-led cycle that links personal spirituality with long-term commitments to justice, God's justice, and the healing of creation.

Keywords: conscientisation; solidarity; hospitality; liberation theology; Latin America; missional formation

Why Latin America Needs a Cyclical Formation Model

On a Saturday night in Bogotá or Buenos Aires, it is easy to believe that revival has won. Soccer stadiums fill with worshipers, testimonies of healing echo through sound systems, and pastors call crowds to renewed personal holiness. Yet, just beyond the

[1] Dr Omar Palafox is Assistant Professor of Bible, Missions & Ministry at Abilene Christian University, where his two decades of bilingual ministry across Latin America and the United States inform courses that unite biblical scholarship with pastoral practice. He holds a DIS in Intercultural Studies (Fuller), an M.Div. in Missions (ACU), an M.S. in Doctrinal Studies, and a B.S. in Bible (LCU). Palafox's research—shaped by his dissertation on Latin American Church of Christ missionaries—explores missional collaboration, liberation theology, and Spirit-led discipleship. A bilingual author, he recently contributed *The Art of Sainthood* (Leafwood 2025). He received ACU's 2023 Outstanding Undergraduate Faculty Award and consults for Mission Resource Network while serving on boards that advance Hispanic theological education.

stadium gates, poverty lines stretch, femicide rates reach record highs, and migrant families sleep in bus terminals (ECLAC 2024). Latin American churches thus inhabit an uneasy intersection: exuberant spiritual vitality amid deepening systemic forms of injustice that disfigure God's good creation.

For decades, liberation theologians have advanced an outward-facing spirituality. Paulo Freire's pedagogy of *conscientização* (critical consciousness), for example, urges believers to read reality through the eyes of the oppressed and to name structural sin (Freire 1970). This lens has influenced how many congregations interpret both Scripture and society, shaping homilies, Bible studies, and pastoral councils. Yet the operational bridge between three movements, critical awareness, public solidarity, and mutually transformative community, often remains implicit. In practice, the three movements usually end up in different ministry "silos." Preaching cultivates awareness, charity programmes shoulder hospitality, and occasional advocacy campaigns gesture toward solidarity. Yet these efforts rarely intersect or inform one another.

Field conversations with pastors from El Alto to Guayaquil made this fracture visible. "We see injustice, and we welcome migrants," a Venezuelan Assemblies of God elder told me, as one pastor summarized, 'We know that God stands with the oppressed, but if I say that too loudly, some members immediately wonder whether I am bringing party politics into the pulpit.' In other words, leaders struggle to distinguish between partisan alignment and prophetic, non-partisan proclamation of God's concern for the oppressed. Similar comments recurred in interviews and workshops. They crystallize what this paper calls the solidarity bottleneck: congregations excel at diagnosing social sin and hosting inclusive fellowship yet hesitate to marshal resources for sustained advocacy. While theologians have described this dynamic anecdotally, empirical confirmation has been scarce, in part because most formation studies in Latin America privilege narrative accounts over quantitative measures (Barros de Carvalho 2018).

I respond to this gap by pairing mixed-methods data with a cyclical missional model of spiritual formation: Conscientisation → Solidarity → Hospitality. The model assumes that sustainable spiritual growth is not linear. Instead, each movement rekindles the previous one in an iterative loop: critical analysis of context leads to concrete acts of solidarity; solidarity brings new neighbours to the table; their stories, in turn, sharpen awareness and restart the cycle. When churches treat these movements as elective ministries that can be pursued independently, formation stalls. When they are intentionally designed to feed one another, personal piety and public justice tend to accelerate together.

The argument follows the movements of this cycle step by step. First, I review interdisciplinary literature on conscientisation, liberationist solidarity, and biblical hospitality, highlighting empirical blind spots that make the solidarity bottleneck difficult to see. Next, I outline the study's methodology, including survey construction and thematic coding, and then present quantitative and qualitative results that highlight the bottleneck across diverse congregations. Building on these findings, I develop an Analyse–Accompany–Assimilate (A-A-A) praxis pathway piloted along the Peru–Bolivia border and read Exodus 2:5–10 as a scriptural prototype of the cycle. Finally, I draw out implications for teaching and leadership, acknowledge the study's limitations, and sketch several paths for future research, treating cyclical formation as a Spirit-empowered exodus from contemporary forms of bondage.

What We Already Know—and Still Don't

Liberationist reflection on spiritual formation in Latin America began by insisting that faith must learn to "read" history. In 1970, Paulo Freire coined *conscientização* to describe a dialogical process in which the oppressed and the oppressor alike become critically aware of social contradictions and commit to transforming them (Freire 1970). Jesuit philosopher–theologian Ignacio Ellacuría extended this insight, portraying education as a "historical task" that frees both teacher and learner for collective praxis (Ellacuría 1990). José Manuel Segundo Galilea likewise linked conscience formation to ecclesial renewal, warning that catechesis without critical analysis risks legitimating social and systemic forms of sin (Segundo Galilea 1976). Within *Mysterium Liberationis*, Juan Luis Segundo and Clodovis Boff further anchor conscientisation in an "epistemology of the poor," arguing that those who suffer injustice possess privileged interpretive access to reality (Segundo 1993; Boff 1993).

Despite this robust theoretical corpus, relatively few studies attempt to quantify conscientisation in congregational life. Carvalho's research on Brazilian youth offers a pioneering example but remains largely isolated (Barros de Carvalho 2018). In response, I developed four awareness items operationalising Ellacuría's "historical task" by asking how frequently congregations interrogate the socio-economic forces shaping their neighbourhoods. They incorporate Segundo's epistemology of the poor by probing whether marginalised voices actually lead that discernment. Turning classic theory into concrete survey indicators makes it easier to connect liberationist pedagogy with the methods described in the next section.

If conscientisation names how believers come to see, solidarity names how they choose to stand. Gustavo Gutiérrez calls solidarity "the definitive faith act," locating it at the intersection of grace and history (Gutiérrez 1973). Jon Sobrino sharpens the

claim by insisting that authentic faith is tested by whether it enters "the crucified peoples'" history (Sobrino 2008). Ellacuría's notion of a "civilization of poverty" and Rutilio Grande's homilies embody this stance, while Óscar Romero's pastoral letters and diary entries trace what ecclesial advocacy looks like under violent repression (Romero 1998; Grande 1977). Drawing on this tradition, the present study defines risk-bearing solidarity as congregational practices such as public advocacy, accompaniment of threatened activists, and concrete redistribution of resources toward marginalised neighbours. At the same time, liberationist authors repeatedly lament that solidarity in parish life is reduced to seasonal offerings or short-term mission trips. This narrowing is the specific gap I attempt to measure in the study.

A third stream of scholarship turns from seeing and standing to sharing life. Hospitality, as recovered in recent biblical and theological work, signals more than a polite welcome. It names the creation of mutually transformative spaces in which the stranger is received as Christ and gradually becomes co-host. Biblical interpreters such as Elsa Tamez re-read figures like Abraham, Ruth, and Lydia through migrant lenses, highlighting how their stories destabilize rigid boundaries of belonging. Pastoral case studies of border ministries, such as *Casa del Migrante*, show how "radical hospitality" functions as both shelter and protest, while Latinx theologians like Robert Chao Romero and Daisy Machado frame hospitality as resistance to nativism and racism. In practice, this stream has given rise to parish-based welcome centres, legal-aid clinics, and liturgies that intentionally blend languages and cultures, flattening traditional host–guest hierarchies.

Taken together, the three movements trace a loose historical arc rather than three isolated doctrines. Conscientisation emphasises Spirit-guided awareness of how social, political, and economic forces can become structures of sin that oppress people, and of the church's calling to participate in God's redemptive transformation of those realities. Solidarity emphasises taking public, risky, and material sides with the marginalised, beyond charity. Hospitality emphasises configuring communities so that strangers are not only received but empowered to reshape the space. Decades of experience have left clear milestones from the 1968 Medellín conference's adoption of Freirean language and the *ver–juzgar–actuar* method in Mexican American *encuentros*, to church-led human-rights offices and sanctuary ministries that seek to defend the God-given dignity of migrants and workers, including efforts to address unjust detention and exploitative labour practices, to hospitality practices that reimagine the parish as a shared home rather than a closed club. Yet most of this history appears in case studies and theological essays, which makes it hard to see how the three movements actually work together as an ongoing process of formation.

Recent work begins to address that oversight by treating formation itself as cyclical. María Clara Bingemer offers qualitative vignettes of Spirit-led cycles in Brazilian favela churches, while José Marins aggregates longitudinal data from Latin American base communities. Essays in *Mysterium Liberationis*, especially those by Luis Carlos Susin and Pablo Richard, provide methodological templates that weave theological exegesis with social-science tools (Ellacuría & Sobrino 1993). More recently, the Romero Institute's national parish survey in El Salvador adds quantitative weight, suggesting that congregations aligned with Archbishop Romero's legacy exhibit higher scores on repeated cycles of awareness, solidarity, and hospitality (Romero Institute 2021). In this study, I draw on survey data, thematic quotations, and pilot-project outcomes to sharpen both the theology and the practice of cyclical formation. To my knowledge, no previous study has measured conscientisation, solidarity, and hospitality together in the same congregations over time. This project is a first attempt to bring all three movements into a single longitudinal frame within congregational life.

Designing the Cycle Survey

I designed a 21-item bilingual questionnaire to move from theological intuition to measurable patterns in congregational life. The instrument traces how pastors perceive spiritual formation across the three movements of the cycle: conscientisation, solidarity, and hospitality. The survey items invite respondents to describe how formation is actually practiced in their congregations—through preaching, small groups, leadership decisions, public engagement, and community life—rather than how they believe it ought to be. The survey uses concrete questions about specific ministry behaviours to bring broad liberationist concepts down to the level of observable congregational habits. One additional forced-choice question asks pastors to identify which movement they believe their church emphasises most and least, providing a quick diagnostic that clarifies their perceptions beyond raw scores.

Fourteen ministers (five women and nine men) from eight countries participated in the study. They completed the questionnaire in Spanish or English, depending on preference, during a period of intensified pastoral reflection marked by recent migration surges, economic volatility, and growing political polarization across the region. The sample includes pastors serving in urban and border contexts as well as those in more traditional parish settings, all of whom are directly involved in preaching, pastoral care, and ministry coordination. Qualitative materials complemented survey data: informal conversations before and after administration, follow-up emails, and my own field notes and monthly journals. These additional materials capture tone, hesitation, and emerging questions that a survey would miss on its own. They also feed into the thematic analysis and the later refinement of the model.

Evidence for the Solidarity Bottleneck

The survey results align with the pattern suggested by the literature and pastoral anecdotes: solidarity consistently lags the other movements of the cycle. When pastors rated how frequently their congregations engaged in practices of conscientisation, solidarity, and hospitality, the solidarity items formed the lowest-scoring cluster across the sample. Pastors report relatively regular attention to systemic analysis of their context in preaching and teaching, and high levels of welcome and care for migrants and the poor, but a noticeable drop when items name risk-bearing advocacy, by which I mean concrete obedience to biblical calls to defend the oppressed, not adherence to any party platform, public accompaniment of threatened neighbours, or concrete redistribution of resources. The "solidarity bottleneck," then, is not only a theological concern but also shows up as a measurable pattern in congregational life.

The forced-choice diagnostic reinforces this picture. After completing the Likert-scale items, pastors were asked to identify which of the three movements they believed their church emphasised most and which it emphasised least. Ten of the fourteen respondents named solidarity as their "weakest link," often contrasting it with comparatively robust hospitality initiatives. In other words, pastors do not simply exhibit lower solidarity scores in the abstract; they recognise and name the gap themselves. The fact that the scores and pastors' own perceptions point in the same direction supports the claim that the bottleneck is real and pastorally significant, not just a quirk of the numbers.

Pastors' own explanations for the gap add texture to the numbers. Three themes recurred across conversations, follow-up emails, and written comments.

First, many described a persistent fear of being perceived as partisan when they named sins such as corruption, discrimination, or exploitative labour practices, considering Scripture. Several had experienced criticism for preaching about these issues as matters of Christian ethics and discipleship, and some saw attendance decline when sermons addressed them as expressions of social sin rather than purely private morality. Others referenced widely publicized cases in which pastors who took strong public stances were labelled partisan or "ideological" and saw attendance decline. For these leaders, the cost of visible advocacy seemed to threaten hard-won congregational stability. As one pastor summarized, "We know that God stands with the oppressed, but if I say that too loudly, some members immediately ask whether I am campaigning for a party."

Second, pastors repeatedly named limited advocacy skills and infrastructure. While many felt confident preaching biblical texts about justice and mercy, fewer felt equipped to translate that conviction into sustained organising. They lacked training in forming partnerships and in helping congregants navigate the complex systems that often block access to justice and basic rights. They sensed that pastoral care now requires some capacity to accompany people through these systems as part of the church’s diaconal ministry. One respondent captured this gap by noting that ‘we can preach Jubilee clearly, but we struggle to translate it into practical support when workers are unjustly treated. Their remarks echo liberation theology’s insistence that spirituality requires technical and organisational capacities to confront unjust structures. At the same time, they expose how rarely ministerial formation includes such training.

Third, leaders cited competing ministry priorities. Evangelistic campaigns, worship events, building projects, and internal pastoral care often consumed most of the congregation’s time and volunteer energy. In several churches, a handful of lay leaders attempted to sustain solidarity efforts, such as visiting detained migrants or supporting workers’ cooperatives, alongside multiple other responsibilities. When crises arose within the church, these fragile initiatives were often the first to be suspended. In practice, many churches treated solidarity as something extra to bolt onto “core” ministries, not as a central expression of discipleship.

Not all the findings were discouraging. A subset of respondents reported modest but noticeable growth in solidarity practices over the previous six months. These pastors were linked, directly or indirectly, to pilot efforts that experimented with cyclical formation, what I call the A-A-A pathway. In these contexts, sermons that analysed local injustices were intentionally followed by concrete opportunities to accompany affected neighbours, and those shared experiences were then brought back into small groups and leadership meetings as occasions for communal discernment and assimilation into the church’s regular rhythms. Pre- and post-survey comparisons in this subset suggest a medium increase in solidarity scores (approximately $d \approx 0.55$), even when conscientisation and hospitality scores remained relatively stable.

Field journals and pastoral reflections help make sense of this shift. When solidarity initiatives were framed as isolated projects, one-off marches, seasonal offerings, or special campaigns, they depended heavily on individual champions and were vulnerable to burnout. When they were integrated into a cyclical process that began with shared analysis and culminated in the assimilation of new practices and stories into the congregation’s identity, they became easier to sustain. Pastors described discovering that small, repeated acts of accompaniment, visiting a shelter, supporting

a workers' meeting, and showing up at a hearing, gradually reshaped congregational expectations of what "normal" ministry looks like.

Together, these findings confirm the presence of a solidarity bottleneck and show where the cycle stalls, while pastors' own explanations highlight the pressures that keep it stuck. The A-A-A pilot cases suggest that when congregations receive both language and practical support to move from analysis to accompaniment to assimilation, the cycle can start turning again. The following section, therefore, turns from describing the bottleneck to examining how the A-A-A pathway functions as both a theological construct and a ministry algorithm for repairing the cycle.

How Analyse–Accompany–Assimilate (A-A-A) Repairs the Cycle

The evidence above suggests that in many congregations, the formation cycle stalls at solidarity. I offer the A-A-A pathway to restart and sustain the cycle. It gives pastors a concrete sequence that turns insight into action and then uses that action to deepen their insight. Instead of adding a new programme, A-A-A rearranges existing ministries so that critical reflection, risk-bearing solidarity, and hospitable community feed into one another. A-A-A therefore functions as a theological framework rooted in liberationist and biblical themes. It is also a practical guide that can shape calendars, budgets, and leadership habits.

In the analysis movement, congregations intentionally read their context through a theological and socio-political lens. Sermons, Bible studies, and leadership meetings are structured to ask not only "What does this text mean?" but also "What is happening in our neighbourhood, and who is most affected?" This corresponds to the conscientisation dimension measured in the survey. However, A-A-A insists that analysis be tethered to specific questions about next steps: Who is suffering? What structures are involved? Which relationships or resources do we already have that could be mobilised? In A-A-A, analysis is meant to send people into action, not to remain a closed exercise in interpretation.

The accompanying movement responds to these questions by initiating concrete, relational acts of solidarity. Here, the focus shifts from describing injustice to standing alongside those who endure it: visiting migrant shelters, supporting organising efforts, attending hearings, or advocating with local officials. The survey showed that such practices are precisely where many congregations falter. A-A-A addresses this bottleneck by building accompaniment into the regular rhythm of congregational life—linking it explicitly to what was previously analysed and scheduling it with the same seriousness as worship or evangelism. Pastors in the pilot reported that when

accompaniment was framed as a natural continuation of Sunday preaching, rather than as an optional "extra," participation increased and fear of backlash diminished.

The assimilate movement then draws the experiences of accompaniment back into the community's memory, identity, and structures. Testimony slots, debriefing sessions, and leadership retreats become spaces where participants narrate what they saw and learned, and where the congregation discerns how these encounters should reshape liturgy, teaching, and resource allocation. In this way, hospitality is deepened: those who were once "guests" become co-interpreters and, eventually, co-leaders. Pilot congregations discovered that this assimilative work was crucial. Without it, solidarity actions remained isolated events, dependent on a few motivated individuals. With it, congregations began to speak of accompaniment as part of "who we are," and budgets, volunteer structures, and preaching calendars were gradually adjusted to reflect that self-understanding.

Insights from social movement theory can illuminate, to some extent, illuminate why A-A-A helps repair the stalled cycle. Scholars such as Sidney Tarrow describe recurring waves of collective action. Theologically, something similar occurs when the Spirit renews the church's life: moments of intensified engagement are followed by periods of consolidation, and new testimonies can rekindle the community's vocation. In congregational terms, hospitality plays that catalytic role. As new people and stories enter the community through acts of welcome, they provide raw material for renewed analysis and fresh calls to accompaniment. A-A-A gives pastors a way to harness this dynamic by ensuring that every influx of new testimonies is intentionally fed back into the Analyse phase rather than dissipating.

The pilot congregations offered an initial test of this logic. Where A-A-A practices were adopted even in modest form, linking preaching series to specific accompaniment opportunities and then to structured times of assimilation, solidarity scores rose while awareness and hospitality remained stable. Pastors noted that the key variable was not individual enthusiasm but structural reinforcement: scheduled reflection moments, protected budget lines, and leadership expectations that each major initiative would move through all three movements of the cycle. These observations point to a practical conclusion: when A-A-A is built into the ordinary governance of the church, for example, into council agendas, annual planning, and budget decisions, solidarity can shift from an occasional project to a sustained expression of spiritual formation. In that way, the pathway begins to repair the stalled cycle described above.

A Biblical Prototype of the Cycle

Exodus 2:5–10 offers a compact narrative in which the movements of the cycle appear in sequence. Pharaoh's daughter descends to the Nile as a member of the ruling household, accompanied by attendants and insulated by privilege. Yet when she notices the basket among the reeds, she does more than satisfy curiosity. She sends a servant to retrieve it, opens it, hears the baby's cry, and recognises both his vulnerability and his ethnicity: "This must be one of the Hebrews' children." In only a few lines, the text shows a privileged woman who lets herself see oppression, feels its claim on her, and responds in ways that disrupt her own household.

The first movement is Analyse. Pharaoh's daughter "sees" more than an abandoned infant; she intuits the structures behind the child's presence in the river. Her own father has issued the decree to kill Hebrew boys. The baby's tears, the makeshift ark, and the location on the riverbank combine to expose the lethal intersection of imperial fear and ethnic domination. Without offering a doctrinal lecture, the story shows conscientisation in embodied form: a member of the royal household reads a concrete situation against the backdrop of state violence. Her recognition that "this is one of the Hebrews' children" signals not mere identification but comprehension of the policy that placed him there.

The second movement is Accompany. Having recognised the child as a victim of her father's decree, Pharaoh's daughter does not remain at the level of insight. She intervenes. She decides to spare the child, accepts the offer of a Hebrew nurse, and commits imperial resources to his survival. In doing so, she takes a limited but real risk: she quietly subverts a genocidal command within the very household that issued it. The narrative does not present her as a revolutionary leader; it presents her as someone who uses the access she has, servants, authority, and economic means, to stand concretely with one threatened life. Solidarity, in this frame, begins not with sweeping declarations but with acts of accompaniment that interrupt the ordinary functioning of unjust structures.

The third movement is Assimilate. Pharaoh's daughter does not simply rescue Moses and then return to business as usual. She adopts him: "He became her son." She names him, brings him into the palace, and allows his presence to reshape her household's story. The Hebrew child, once marked for death, becomes a permanent part of Egypt's royal upbringing and, eventually, the human agent through whom God will confront Pharaoh. Hospitality here is not a momentary gesture of charity. It is the long-term incorporation of the stranger in ways that alter identity, memory, and future

possibilities. What began as an act of accompaniment becomes a reconfiguration of community.

Read through the lens of the A-A-A pathway, Pharaoh's daughter thus embodies the entire cycle. She analyses a situation of oppression from within an oppressive system; she accompanies a specific victim at personal and political risk; and she assimilates that act into her ongoing life by making space for the child to belong and to grow. Her example neither romanticises imperial elites nor ignores the state-sponsored violence of Pharaoh's court. Instead, it shows how people and communities with power can use their access, resources, and voice to move the cycle forward instead of letting it stop at awareness or occasional charity.

For Latin American congregations wrestling with the solidarity bottleneck, this narrative functions as more than an inspirational story. It offers a biblical prototype in which analysis, solidarity, and hospitality are sequential and mutually reinforcing. Preaching and teaching on Exodus 2 can therefore do double work: it can expose mechanisms by which earthly powers inflict death and exclude the vulnerable, reminding the church that all authorities are accountable before God's justice, and it can model a concrete pattern of response that aligns closely with the A-A-A pathway. When churches learn to see as Pharaoh's daughter saw, to stand with threatened neighbours as she did, and to let those neighbours reshape their communal life, the formation cycle moves from abstraction into a practiced, Spirit-led habit.

Seven Tools to Keep the Cycle Turning

In this final section, I suggest practical tools that ministry teams can adapt in their own contexts. Each tool is tied mainly to one movement of the cycle, A-A-A, and to a particular ministry area, so leaders can see where formation is getting stuck. Building on Pharaoh's daughter's pattern of seeing, standing, and sharing, these tools aim to keep the missional formation cycle moving instead of letting it stall at awareness or intermittent charity.

Teaching structures are a natural place to restart the cycle. Instead of "banking" models of religious instruction in which congregants passively receive information (Freire 1970), churches can adopt dialogical *ver–juzgar–actuar* (see–judge–act) modules (Holland & Henriot 1983). Small groups and Bible studies can become spaces where participants read Scripture and neighbourhood realities side by side and then design concrete actions that grow out of that reading. In that sense, teaching becomes a driver of conscientisation that regularly launches the Analyse phase, not just a vehicle for transmitting doctrine.

If congregations measure success only by attendance, giving, or the number of programmes, love of neighbour will remain secondary. A second shift is to broaden what counts as "success." Alongside internal measures, churches can attend to signs of their neighbours' well-being in concrete forms that local communities discern as faithful to Scripture. Framed this way, the goal is not partisan alignment but visible practices of mercy, well-being, and hospitality. Leadership teams might ask each year, 'Where did we accompany our neighbours, and what needs did we help carry?' Treating that question as central privileges accompaniment over inward-facing metrics and reduces the pressure to retreat into exclusively internal goals. This posture does not endorse any party or platform; it names a gospel obligation to seek the good of those nearby.

A third focus concerns who is recognised and empowered. Alongside traditional pastoral and teaching roles, congregations can intentionally commission apostolic and prophetic gifts, those who initiate new works and name injustices, and flatten leadership hierarchies so that lay members, especially women and migrants, can exercise agency. When leadership structures explicitly bless and protect those who organise accompaniment, the weight of solidarity no longer rests on a few informal champions. The church's governance begins to reinforce the Accompany movement itself.

Many pastors in the study named limited advocacy skills and fear of retaliation as key obstacles. A fourth strategy is to develop carefully discerned partnerships, judged by whether they respect the church's confession of Christ and its nonpartisan witness, with organisations that defend the dignity of the poor and the stranger. By collaborating with community groups and legal-support networks, churches can borrow technical expertise while also diffusing risk. Such partnerships allow congregations to stand publicly with marginalised neighbours without acting alone, thus strengthening the Accompany phase and addressing skill and protection gaps that individual churches cannot easily overcome.

To keep the cycle from collapsing back into occasional activism, congregations need practices that regularly assimilate experiences of accompaniment into communal identity. Embedding table fellowship, co-leadership liturgies, and testimony spaces that prominently feature newcomers' voices is a fifth tool. When migrants, workers, and other formerly "guest" participants share how they see God at work and are invited to participate in visible leadership, hospitality becomes mutually transformative. These practices deepen the Assimilate movement and ensure that new stories continually reshape the community's memory, priorities, and expectations of "normal" church life.

Finally, research itself can serve as a means of formation. Longitudinal mixed-methods studies that compare rural and urban settings, examine Indigenous reciprocity cycles, and test the speed and durability of the formation cycle across denominational families would help leaders see where and how the cycle accelerates or stalls. By repeating instruments like the one used here and pairing them with observation of actual practices, churches and seminaries can treat Analyse, Accompany, and Assimilate not only as theological ideas but also as dimensions of congregational life that can be watched and strengthened over time.

Together, these tools invite congregations to see as Pharaoh's daughter saw, to stand as she stood, and to share life as she was willing to share it. When teaching, metrics, leadership, partnerships, community practices, and research all line up with the A-A-A cycle, hospitality can spark renewed solidarity instead of quietly taking its place. The following section situates these recommendations within the study's limitations and outlines research pathways to test and adapt them in other settings.

Conclusion

Latin American churches already see injustice with prophetic clarity and welcome strangers with genuine warmth. What too often stalls is the costly step of standing in public solidarity with those same neighbours. The data in this study make that stall visible: across eight countries and several denominations, pastors reported stronger patterns of conscientisation and hospitality than of risk-bearing advocacy. This pattern supports the claim that a "solidarity bottleneck" exists and moves it beyond anecdote. At the same time, the findings indicate that the bottleneck is not fixed. When congregations experimented with the A-A-A rhythm, solidarity scores rose while awareness and hospitality remained steady, suggesting that intentional scaffolding can restart the cycle. Field journals and pastoral reflections showed how small, repeated acts of accompaniment—visiting shelters, supporting worker petitions, attending hearings—began to recalibrate what members considered "normal" ministry. Hospitality, in these cases, ceased to function as the endpoint of mission and instead became the spark that reignited critical awareness and public witness to Christ's kingdom.

Theologically, the article retrieves Pharaoh's daughter as a scriptural prototype for communities that occupy privileged positions of access and security. Her decision to see, to intervene, and to adopt a threatened child within the very household that ordered his death illustrates how liberation can begin inside the palace when insiders risk proximity and reconfigure their own spaces. For congregations that identify with her social location, Exodus 2 thus becomes not only a story about Moses but a

vocational call: to use resources, influence, and voice to pivot the formation cycle forward rather than allowing it to stall at analysis or intermittent charity.

Methodologically, the study introduces a first instrument for tracking how quickly—and how often, the formation cycle moves in different contexts and over time. The 21-item survey, combined with qualitative materials, provides a replicable way to measure conscientisation, solidarity, and hospitality within the same congregations and to test how changes in pedagogy, leadership, and partnerships affect the cycle. Given the small, purposive sample and reliance on self-report, future research will need larger, randomised samples, behavioural indicators, and longer timelines, as well as careful attention to Indigenous reciprocity practices and Pentecostal worship dynamics that may accelerate or reshape the cycle.

All in all, the findings suggest that Latin American churches do not mainly lack theology or spiritual energy. What is often missing are structures—such as planning processes, leadership expectations, and budget practices—that reliably carry communities from seeing to standing to sharing life. The A-A-A pathway, grounded in liberationist insight and tested in local congregations, offers one way to align teaching, ministry design, and biblical interpretation so that hospitality catalyses renewed solidarity rather than replacing it. Where these rhythms are taken seriously and built into everyday practice, spiritual formation and public justice as God's justice made visible in social relationships begin to move together, and the church's ordinary life starts to look like a sustained, Spirit-led exodus from contemporary forms of bondage.

References

Barros de Carvalho, A.P. 2018, *Faith in Action: Base Communities and Social Change in Brazil*, Paulus, São Paulo.

Bingemer, M.C. 2012, *Latin American Theologies: Paths, Issues, and New Horizons*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY.

Boff, C. 1993, ‘Epistemology and Methodology of Liberation Theology’, in I. Ellacuría & J. Sobrino (eds), *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY, pp. 69–98.

Boff, C. 1999, *Eucharist and Human Liberation*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY.

Colón-Emeric, E. 2018, *Óscar Romero’s Theological Vision: Liberation and the Transfiguration of the Poor*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, IN.

Dussel, E. 1993, *Para una ética de la liberación latinoamericana*, Siglo XXI Editores, Mexico City.

Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) 2024, *Social Panorama of Latin America 2024*, United Nations, Santiago.

Ellacuría, I. 1990, *Filosofía de la realidad histórica*, UCA Editores, San Salvador.

Ellacuría, I. 1993, ‘Utopia and Prophetic Church’, in M.E. Lee (ed.), *Freedom Made Flesh: The Mission of Christ and of the Church*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY, pp. 259–75.

Ellacuría, I. & Sobrino, J. (eds) 1993, *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY.

Exodus 2:6 (NRSV) 1989, *New Revised Standard Version Bible*, Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN.

Freire, P. 1970, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. M.B. Ramos, Continuum, New York.

Grande, R. 1977, *Homilías: El Evangelio en el Pueblo*, UCA Editores, San Salvador.

Gutiérrez, G. 1973, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, trans. C. Inda & J. Eagleson, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY.

Holland, J. & Henriot, P. 1983, *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice*, Orbis Books, Washington, DC.

Marins, J. 2003, *Comunidades Eclesiais de Base: Building the Church of the Poor*, Paulus, São Paulo.

Palafox, O. 2025, *The Art of Sainthood*, Leafwood Press, Abilene, TX.

Pohl, C.D. 1999, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI.

Richard, P. 1993, 'Apocalyptic and Utopia', in I. Ellacuría & J. Sobrino (eds), *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY, pp. 563–84.

Romero Institute 2021, *After the Archbishop: A National Parish Survey on Social Engagement in El Salvador*, Romero Institute, San Salvador.

Romero, Ó.A. 1981, *The Violence of Love*, comp. & trans. J.R. Brockman, Twenty-Third Publications, Mystic, CT.

Romero, Ó.A. 1998, *Pastoral Letters 1977–1980*, trans. J.R. Brockman, Arzobispado de San Salvador, San Salvador.

Sánchez, L. 2022, 'Migrant Ministries and Mutual Transformation in Northern Mexico', *Journal of Latin American Missiology*, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 45–66.

Segundo, J.L. 1993, 'The Historical Jesus and the Christian Faith', in I. Ellacuría & J. Sobrino (eds), *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY, pp. 107–28.

Segundo Galilea, J.M. 1976, *Catequesis y Liberación*, Editorial Guadalupe, Buenos Aires.

Sobrino, J. 1993, 'The Principle of Mercy: The Universal Demand of Love', in I. Ellacuría & J. Sobrino (eds), *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY, pp. 157–85.

Sobrino, J. 2008, *No Salvation Outside the Poor: Prophetic-Utopian Essays*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY.

Susin, L.C. 1993, ‘Base Communities’, in I. Ellacuría & J. Sobrino (eds), *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY, pp. 509–26.

Tarrow, S. 2011, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 3rd edn, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

To cite (Harvard):

Palafox, J.O. (2026), 'Toward a cyclical missional model of spiritual formation in Latin America', *Journal of Religion and Public Life*, 3(1), pp. 5-22. DOI: https://doi.org/10.70600/jrpl.v3i1.004

Disclosure Statements

The author has not reported any potential conflict of interest.

The author has not reported the use of generative AI in the research for and preparation of this paper.

This research received no specific funding.