



Hispanic/Latino Ministry Report for Diocesan Convention March 4, 2023

Dear Brothers & Sisters,

The Hispanic Coalition was created to work with English-speaking congregations looking to develop a new ministry in Spanish for the Hispanic community in the surrounding area. In about 10 years, we have developed many bilingual communities throughout the Diocese. The Hispanic communities that developed now take part in the leadership of the church such as serving on Vestry. There are currently many additional congregations eager to begin this process of welcoming their Spanish-speaking brothers and sisters. Our hope is to continue to support all the congregations interested in welcoming the Hispanic community into their existing congregation. Because of the pandemic, we were concerned about continuing to grow our Hispanic ministries across the Diocese once the restrictions were lifted. The Lord had other plans because we have been able to work on developing more ministries in new areas and we have increased attendance in most of the developed congregations.

Update on our 8 Congregations with Ministry in both English and Spanish

Trinity Church, Asbury Park – The Rev. Chase Danford

Trinity Church is known for embracing and accepting all people. The Hispanic community has felt that since the start of the ministry in 2018. In November 2022, the Spanish service moved from 5pm to 9am. This change resulted in higher attendance from families and increased connections between the Spanish-speaking and English-speaking parishioners of Trinity. One of the results of those increased connections is the raising up of a dedicated bilingual adult lay leader who now provides translation assistance to the clergy and liturgical leadership support for the service. Trinity hopes that eventually children from the Spanish service will join the English language Sunday school (as the children primarily speak English). In 2022, one baptism was celebrated and two First Communions. In 2023 the community is preparing for an adult baptism. Fr Chase Danford celebrates the service in Spanish, while the homily is offered in Spanish by a pastoral assistant when available. When Fr Danford is solo, bilingual lay leader Mary Perez translates his homily. Felipe Huamani served as pastoral assistant for several years before being assigned to All Saints in Lakewood at the end of 2022. Roberto Rojas, who has also served as pastoral assistant for several years, continues at Trinity. Both Mr. Huamani and Mr. Rojas are in the process of having their orders recognized and transferred to the Episcopal Church.

St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Bound Brook – The Rev. Kristen C. Foley

In this area approximately half of its neighbors are from Spanish-speaking or Spanish-dominant households. St. Paul's has been prayerfully resurrecting the Latino ministry for the last three years. Currently there are two services on Sundays: one in Spanish and the other in English. St. Paul's seeks to faithfully introduce the two, largely separate congregations to form a single, Christian body. In 2022, St. Paul's celebrated Dia de Todo Los Santos (All Saint's Day) and Nochebuena (Christmas Eve) in Spanish for the first time. The congregation also welcomed four children of God from Spanish-dominant households in the sacrament of Baptism. Two of the recently baptized children occasionally participate in the English language Sunday school classes and activities. The Latino ministry relies

extensively and gratefully on lay leadership. The community of St. Paul's hopes to plant seeds for ministry among its neighbors and trusts Jesus to provide growth.

All Saints, Lakewood – *The Rev. Nicole Kurkowski, Dcn*

All Saints currently holds Spanish speaking worship services at 12:30pm each Sunday, with an average attendance of 40-60 people. Sunday school has resumed, post pandemic with an average of 20 Hispanic children attending regularly. The church was awarded a \$3,000 children's ministry grant via the Episcopal Diocese of NJ Youth Council. In 2023, the All Saints Children's ministry will partner with Christ Church Toms River to broaden the children's circle of friends, sharing common activities a few times per year. All Saints held two full days of Vacation Bible School (VBS) this summer, where the children received hands-on lessons regarding the Holy Eucharist. Forty-four children were sponsored through our Angel Tree this Christmas; they also received their own bibles. The Hispanic ministry at All Saints is thriving! In 2022, there were 8 confirmations, 10 receptions, and 8 Baptisms of Hispanic members. Over 100 people attended the Lady of Guadalupe Vigil and Procession. Likewise, the Novenas and Posadas were well-attended. The first-ever All Saints Hispanic Lay Leadership Retreat was held in December. During this retreat 15 lay persons were empowered to serve as leaders in the church. The next retreat will be held in February 2023. Effective February 2023, half of the All Saints vestry is comprised of Spanish-speaking members, which is a major shift from previous years where English-speaking members were a majority. All Saints sponsored the Mexican Consulate in 2022, which greatly helped individuals obtain important documentation that they otherwise would not have access to. Father Ramon Ubiera has been helping the English-speaking Deacon Administrator on a part time basis with the 12:30 worship services. In 2023, Felipe Huamani will consistently serve at All Saints along with the Deacon Administrator.

Church of the Resurrection, Millville – *The Rev. Ellen C. Rutherford, Javier and Marisela Suarez*

During the pandemic, we began to post Morning Prayer in Spanish on our congregational Facebook page. In November 2022, we began in-person services in Spanish. Every week the community gathers on Sundays at 5pm for Eucharist and fellowship. The community is growing steadily, and several children participate as readers during Sunday service. Celebrating together has been common especially when there is a birthday with cake and music.

St. Peter's, Perth Amboy – *The Rev. Canon Ramon Ubiera*

The community of Perth Amboy is made up of a significant number of Hispanic/Latino people. Canon Ramon has been leading the Spanish service one Sunday a month at 11:30AM with an attendance of 12-15 people. We hope to continue to grow this community.

St. Thomas, Red Bank – *The Rev. Clive Sang, Dcn. The Rev. Joseph Luzardo, Dcn*

Fr. Mark Van Sant assisted at St. Thomas and retired in May of 2022. Deacon Jose Luzardo and Deacon Clive continue to provide the spiritual and administrative observances at St. Thomas. Services at St. Thomas take place at 9am in English and 11:30am in Spanish. Attempts at combined English/Spanish worship has been a challenge, and worship continues separately. The average attendance at the services has been slowly improving as the effects of the pandemic decreases. A bilingual Compline takes place every Friday via zoom at 7pm. There is monthly Bible Study for the 9am worshippers, and a weekly Bible Study for the 11:30am worshippers. St. Thomas often has trouble with the availability of Supply Clergy, especially for the 11:30am Service. The cultural diversity of the

congregation is celebrated throughout the year - Black History Month; Our Lady of Guadeloupe; Novenas and Posadas.

Holy Trinity, South River – *The Rev. Gregory Bezilla, The Rev. Arian Wharff-Galvis*

Latino services in Spanish were led on an occasional basis by Canon Ramon Ubiera and Deacon Gerry Welch, who served on a voluntary basis as a visiting deacon throughout the year. When the rectory became vacant, the Diocese approached the parish with a proposal to house a Priest Associate for Hispanic ministry, who would minister on a half-time basis in exchange for the parish assuming all house related expenses. In late April, the Rev. Arian Wharff-Galvis moved into the rectory, which was rechristened “Casa Amistad” (Friendship House). Starting in the summer 2022, Casa Amistad has served as the gathering space for weekly classes for Latino children to prepare for a solemn rite of “First Communion.” Two downstairs rooms were used as classrooms: one for children whose strongest language is Spanish; the other for Latino children who speak English only. 32 children prepared for their participation in a rite of solemn communion at the Spanish Mass at the Latino Festival, which was organized jointly by the Hispanic Commission and by members of the parish Latino ministry. The festival was attended by about 300 people from around the diocese in the course of the day. Bishop Stokes presided at the festival mass and blessed Casa Amistad. In October, Casa Amistad also hosted a workshop on Episcopal Church Identity by a visiting presenter from the Episcopal Diocese of Colombia, the Rev. Carlos Rendon, who drew an overflow crowd for his slideshow presentation. (Interested persons were also provided with a copy of the book on which he partially based his talk, *Anden en amor: Creencias y prácticas episcopales*, by Scott Gunn and Melody Wilson Shobe). Rosalie Disimone-Weiss, a ministry intern, organized an English-language Sunday school, which met during the Spanish Mass, with volunteer support from Latino and Americano members. On November 18th, the Feast of the Virgin of Chiquinquirá, a Marian devotion popular in Venezuela, was celebrated with a Mass and festive supper—the second largest attendance for a Latino ministry event in 2022. The Rev. Wharff-Galvis recruited a Latino Leadership Committee to advise and coordinate ministries. In support of their development as leaders, committee members attended a Latino Vestry Workshop in Elizabeth presented by the Rev. Hilario Albert. One of the many initiatives of the Latino leaders was to organize an observance of *la Novena de Navidad* (nine days leading into Christmas Eve) in which members took turns hosting evening devotional gatherings and inviting their friends and family. Casa Amistad also hosted one of the Novena gatherings.

Christ Church, Toms River – *The Rev. Lisa Hoffman, the Rev. Jose Cantos, the Ven. Theodore Foley, Dcn.*

Fr. Jose Cantos and Mother Lisa Hoffman have built relationships with the families of the 12pm service. Several new families have joined the church and are bringing new life as we see young children participating in church events. These members have made a commitment to the activities of the church, which means that they see the Episcopal Church as their spiritual family. Christ Church, noting the large number of children and young people, has made them start to think about how to carry out creative activities for this group. In December 2022, children and some adults received First Communion and they continue to participate in Sunday service and different church activities. For Christ Church this means that it has gone from a sacramental Church to a committed and participatory church. Our Spanish speaking members have their catechism during Sunday service, they have a Spanish ALPHA group, and they have a potluck the first Sunday of the month at the Rectory. In Fall of 2022, Christ Church began “Santa Eucharistic del Inmigrante” the first Sunday of the month. Santa Eucaristia del Inmigrante was introduced to parishioner Phyllis Long at the Episcopal Latino

Competency Course. Mother Lisa has been a great support and she gives her time to get to know the community and is present at the 12pm service.

Update on our 5 Hispanic Congregations (fully Spanish)

St. Andrews, Camden – The Rev. Canon Pedro Guzman

Fr. Pedro leads the Spanish service at 11am every Sunday. Fr. Pedro is very active with the Hispanic community in Camden as well as the Hispanic Commission.

San Jose, Elizabeth – The Rev. Toribio Rodriguez

Fr. Toribio leads the Spanish service at 11am every Sunday. Sunday school takes place every Sunday at 9am. San Jose has a formation group for the youth on Saturdays at 11am. The food pantry is open to the community on the second and fourth Saturday of the month. They have AA meetings throughout the week. Along with St. John's, they have an immigration center that is available to the community, the lawyer and teams are on-site on Saturdays.

St. Johns, Elizabeth – The Rev. Jorge Antonely

Fr. Jorge Antonely has been leading the service at 11am on Sundays. The community has been growing and has activities for members throughout the year. Coffee hour is well attended for fellowship. St. John's operates an immigration center that is available to the community. Read more about the growing ministry here:

<https://livingchurch.org/2022/12/28/a-legacy-of-kindness-st-johns-church-elizabeth-nj/>

St. Mary's, Keyport – The Rev. Jose Cantos

The Spanish service has been led by Fr. Jose Cantos on Sundays at 5pm. Unfortunately, very few people attended the service. On Wednesday and Friday mornings the church is open for the community and some regularly come to pray or to talk to Fr. Jose. This ministry will be ending soon.

Cristo Rey, Trenton – The Rev. Ramon Antonio Liz Lopez

Fr. Francisco Pozo retired in June 2022 after serving for 28 years in our diocese. Fr. Ramon came to Cristo Rey as an Interim Priest on July 17, 2022. The Sunday service continues at 10:30am with about 60 people attending. Sunday school for the children takes place during the morning service and ends in time for them to participate during Holy Communion. Fr Ramon also holds a service Thursdays at 6pm. The Food Pantry is open weekly on Friday and Sundays. The Bishop appointed the Rev. Lynn Johnson as a temporary director of the day care at Cristo Rey. Cristo Rey is in transition and in the process of looking for a Rector.

The Hispanic Coalition & The Hispanic Commission

The Hispanic Coalition works with English-speaking congregations who have, or are interested in developing, a Hispanic ministry. The Coalition also works as a resource for the congregations looking for ways to welcome the Spanish-speaking community in their area into their church. I thank the President of the Coalition, the Rev. Canon Joan Pettit Mason; the Diocesan liaison, Canon Phyllis Jones, and Coalition secretary Selena Garcia.

The Hispanic Commission is a long-standing Commission of the Diocese of New Jersey. They provide training, formation, and spiritual development at the congregational level, and the wider Episcopal church level for Hispanic members of the Diocese. Each year as we work together, we strengthen our goal of welcoming our marginalized brothers and sisters. It takes many of us to create, nourish, and strengthen what we are currently creating in our churches. The Hispanic Commission sponsored a Latino Leadership Workshop in October at San Jose, Elizabeth and about 80 people attended. I am blessed to have the support to continue growing this community. I thank the co-chairs of the Commission, the Rev. Toribio Rodriguez and Canon Sebastian Vasquez, and all the members that form part of the Hispanic Commission.

Notice of an Upcoming Event

On April 1st at 9:30am a Spanish Anti-Racism Training will take place at St. Marguerite's Retreat House Community of St. John the Baptist in Mendham Township led by Dr. Victor M. Dominguez. This Anti-Racism workshop sponsored by the Anti-Racism Commission is focused on how racism impacts the Hispanic community and Spanish-speaking immigrants. Registration opens on February 15th on the Diocesan website.

Thank you to Bishop William "Chip" Stokes

None of this important work could have come to fruition without the faith Bishop Stokes placed in me and our Diocese as a whole. The vision the Bishop saw grow was done with his support and with the power of the Holy Spirit. He led several services in both languages and the Hispanic community admired that. He made this community feel seen and at home in the Episcopal Church. Bishop Stokes has convened meetings with Bishops of Newark, Pennsylvania, Delaware and New Jersey to consider creating a regional Hispanic program to prepare Spanish speakers for ordained ministry in the Episcopal church. We are also exploring possible connections with Seminaries in Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Mexico as possible resources for formation and training of Spanish speakers seeking to be ordained in the Episcopal church and for our Diocese. It has been an honor to work alongside him and we are looking forward to continuing this growing ministry with our new Bishop-elect, the Rev. Canon Dr. Sally French.

Conclusion

There is so much excitement to see what the future has in store for our Diocese. I believe one of the many reasons this ministry has been successful is how welcoming we are. We are not separate people in our church. I am grateful for everyone who has a part of this ministry. I request your prayers as we continue to develop and strengthen this ministry.

The Rev. Canon Ramon Ubiera Torres+
Canon Missioner for Hispanic Ministries Diocese of New Jersey