



Hispanic/Latino Ministry Report for Diocesan Convention March 9, 2024

1 Corinthians 9:21-23

To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings

Dear Brothers & Sisters,

The Hispanic Commission and the Hispanic Coalition are two teams working together to strengthen Hispanic ministry in the Diocese of New Jersey. The Hispanic community is growing rapidly and there is a greater demand to serve than our ability to respond. It is our mission to serve and support all the congregations looking to welcome and strengthen the Hispanic community.

We held a Convocation Meeting in the Fall with about 80 people attending, along with Bishop Sally French. Most of the attendees were interested in being lay leaders to help their community. About 10 people expressed interest about learning more on how to become ordained clergy in the Episcopal Church. In the Fall, we held a training session for English-speaking clergy to lead a service in Spanish phonetically. Eleven clergy attended.

We will continue to sustain and grow our current communities. We will be working with the School of Ministry to raise up and train new Spanish-speaking clergy to develop new ministry locations in counties of rapid growth.

Update on our 9 Congregations with Ministry in both English and Spanish

Trinity Church, Asbury Park – The Rev. Chase Danford

Trinity Church has a Spanish service at 9am. The community is very small but the members faithfully attend the service. One of the families that attend the service moved to a different town, but still makes it to Trinity because they feel a sense of belonging. Fr. Chase celebrates the service in Spanish and the sermon is done by Roberto Rojas. Occasionally, Fr. Chase will need to have his sermon translated by lay leader, Mary Perez. Lay leader, Mary Perez, has created a bridge for pastoral presence for the Spanish speaking members. In 2023 they had a baptism and celebrated First Holy Communion. Fr. Chase hopes to create a better connection and growth for this community.

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

In the Bound Brook area, nearly half of St. Paul's neighbors are from Spanish-speaking or Spanish-dominant households. St. Paul's has been prayerfully resurrecting the Latino ministry for the last four years to varying degrees of success. Currently there are two services on Sundays: one in Spanish and the other in English. In 2023, St. Paul's celebrated Dia de los Muertos (All Saint's Day) in Spanish for the first time. Two of the bilingual children baptized into St. Paul's church family occasionally participate in the English-language Sunday school classes and activities. One faithful lay leader plans to be received into the Episcopal Church during Bishop French's upcoming visit. The Latino ministry relies extensively and gratefully on lay leadership. St. Paul's was present at the Hispanic Resource Festival in October, furthering our outreach among its neighbors. The community of St. Paul's continues to plant seeds for ministry among its neighbors and trusts Jesus to provide growth.

All Saints, Lakewood – The Rev. Nicole Kurkowski, The Rev. Felipe Huamani

The Holy Spirit is active in All Saints Lakewood! In July 2023, Rev. Felipe Huamani Rojas (Priest Associate) was received as a priest of the Episcopal Church, serving as the Hispanic ministry leader for All Saints. Father Felipe leads the 12:30 worship service every Sunday with an average attendance of 50 (and growing). In December, over 200 people attended the Lady Guadalupe Vigil and Procession. The *Dia de Los Muertos* services also were well-attended, as were the Advent prayer services (novenas, posadas, Lady Guadalupe prayers in homes). The Spanish-speaking chorus is the heart of All Saints worship.

In 2024, All Saints welcomed new congregants, including 16 Hispanic members through 12 baptisms and 4 confirmations. We also celebrated one holy matrimony. Hispanic laity are now playing a prominent role in the leadership of the church; half of the vestry is now comprised of Spanish-speaking members. Hispanic lay leaders have also been active in representing All Saints in diocesan events. To advance spiritual formation, a weekly Bible study is held on Friday evenings. The church has also recently started a program for couples. During Lent, Stations of the Cross will be held every Friday evening. All Saints also has a youth program, which trains children to serve as acolytes and teaches important moral and spiritual topics.

The Children's Ministry is perhaps the most active ministry of All Saints. In 2023, an inaugural Fall Festival, Field Trip to Sight & Sound to see *Moses* (in Pennsylvania), Angel Tree, Christmas Pageant, Easter Egg Hunt, Sunday School, and Vacation Bible School (VBS) were held. All Saints partnered with Christ Church, Toms River (CCTR) on the execution of the 2023 VBS program and will seek additional opportunities with CCTR in 2024.

All Saints is prominent in the community in advancing service equity. In December, a bilingual lawyer provided a seminar to congregants on immigration matters, with follow-up discussions to assist with specific needs. All Saints provides services to the community through a Scholarship Program, Thrift Shop and transitional housing program (Samaritan House).

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

Mother Ellen and Javier continued their in-person services in Spanish this year, and the young people served as acolytes and readers. Mother Ellen welcomed Canon Ubiera to service early in the year and celebrated baptisms and first communions together. The Easter Vigil was a bilingual service, including baptism. A Ladies' Tea and an annual church picnic combined members

from different worship services to make these bilingual events. Church of the Resurrection continue to post Sunday Morning Prayer in Spanish on our congregational Facebook page.

St. Peter's, Perth Amboy – The Rev. Canon Ramon Ubiera, Hector Jr. Cruz

The city of Perth Amboy is made up of a significant number of Hispanic/Latino people. Canon Ramon was asked by the Vestry to lead the Spanish service one Sunday a month at 11:30AM. The Vestry recently elected Hector Jr. Cruz, during the annual meeting, as the Latino representative to create better connection between both communities.

St. Thomas, Red Bank – The Rev. Jose Cantos, The Rev. Kevin Thompson, Dcn

From February to October 2023, Fr. Jose Cantos was a celebrant two Sundays a month at the Sunday service in Spanish at 11:30am and was present twice a week for pastoral care. On October 25th to date, the schedule of masses in Spanish changed to 5pm and gave the possibility of Fr. Jose being present every Sunday. Every Sunday he sees the Spanish community growing. New people and some people who stopped coming are reaching out again. This time change has been a great blessing for the Hispanic community. Every Friday there is a Bible study where the growth of the participants is noted. Quinceañera celebrations, baptisms and funerals in Spanish took place throughout the year. Two couples are participating in Emparejados at Christ Church. It was a blessing to have Dcn. Joseph Luzardo at St. Thomas and now he is at Holy Trinity, South River. We are thankful for all he has done in this community. After the transition of Dcn. Clive Sang, St. Thomas welcomed Dcn. Kevin Thompson. Fr. Jose and Dcn. Kevin are working together strengthening both communities.

Holy Trinity, South River – The Rev. Cn. Terence A. Lee, The Rev. Jorge Antonely-Martinez, The Rev. Joseph Luzardo, Dcn

Fr. Jorge Antonely began serving this ministry in July 2023. The service takes place every Sunday at 2pm. Currently he has 17 faithful, attending every Sunday but in the recent Sundays with all the Sacraments being done such as 1st Communion, Baptism, and Holy Matrimony there, it can be up to 45 people. Many people come to church looking for sacraments and the goal is to get these families to participate in serving as acolytes or in other areas to make them part of the church. Musicians from St. John's will begin participating at Holy Trinity during Sunday service. Fr. Jorge sees more faces as he continues to build this community. The vision is to continue to do Gods work with joy, and transformation and growth will come.

St. Peters, Spotswood – The Rev. Marshall K. Shelly

Fr. Marshall Shelly leads two services on Sunday at 8am and 10am that incorporate bilingual blessings and prayers. St. Peters has a long-time Spanish speaking parishioner and Vestry member named Rosita and they wanted to include her native language in all Sunday services. The members that were not supportive of the shift to bilingual worship are experiencing an eye-opening journey and growing their faith as they begin accepting this change. At St. Peters' there is a mix of Mexican, Peruvian, and Puerto Rican families. When the community gathers in fellowship there is a variety of foods and Fr. Marshall is grateful for the ladies of the church, like Demaris and Rosita, that enjoy planning these gatherings. St. Peters' has a Thrift Shop that began opening on Thursday evenings. This created a better time for Hispanic/Latino people to attend the Thrift Shop after work. They celebrated Dia de los Muertos and the ofrenda was set up by Sunday school. In 2024 they look forward to upcoming baptisms, first communions, and

quinceaneras. Fr. Marshall believes when new people arrive to St. Peters, they transform the parish. With the Hispanic/Latino members arriving to St. Peters their gifts and contributions are working that transformation in everyone and helping them grow. At St. Peters, the new members notice the welcoming environment and enjoy the deep pastoral connection given to everyone.

Christ Church, Toms River – *The Rev. Lisa Hoffman, the Rev. Jose Cantos*

Fr. Jose Cantos and Mother Lisa Hoffman continue having a Spanish service at 12pm. For part of the year, Fr. Jose alternated weekends with St. Thomas but now he has returned to being present every Sunday. This community is made up of many young parents and a lot of children. The children are actively involved during the service. Christ Church has a successful group called Emparejados; it is monthly sessions for couples to strengthen their relationship. The first Sunday of the month is Santa Eucaristia del Inmigrante (Immigrant Mass), after there is a potluck at the Rectory. The Virgen de Guadalupe Celebration is always a grand celebration at Christ Church. During the Guadalupe service we also celebrated First Holy Communion. The goal is to create new experiences for the families. We would like to have a longer Confirmation preparation to help develop habits with worship and community service. We would also like to educate the community on topics such as health, finances, continued education, and much more. With this ever-growing community, Fr. Jose and Mother Lisa hope to continue to evolve together with the help and support of the whole parish.

Update on our 4 Hispanic Congregations (fully Spanish)

St. Andres, Camden – *The Rev. Canon Pedro Guzman*

Fr. Pedro leads the Spanish service at 11am every Sunday with an average attendance of 128. Sunday school is at 10am with about 20 children participating. They have Food Pantry twice a month that serves about 200 families every month. San Andres joins St. Paul, Camden to feed the homeless. In October, San Andres began a Basic Skills Plumbing and Heating program that ran for 3 months with about 50 students participating and 20 students completing the program. This program began with a \$15,000 grant from Episcopal Community Services (ECS). Some of those students were hired by a company right after graduating the program. The graduates were gifted a box of tools to help get them started with work. The 5th Annual Gala took place in December and the proceeds of this gala went to helping immigrant families. 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. On average about 100-125 people attend Sunday service. Sunday school takes place at 9am and about 12 children participate. San Jose has a formation group for the youth on Saturdays at 11am. San Jose has a very active Food Pantry that takes place on the second and fourth Saturday of the month. There are AA meetings throughout the week.

St. Johns, Elizabeth – *The Rev. Jorge Antonely-Martinez*

Fr. Jorge Antonely has been leading the service at 11am on Sundays. The average attendance at a Sunday service is about 125 people. During big events like the Bishop's visit in October, about 287 people attended and over 50 people were confirmed or received. Since St. John's is so diverse in ethnicities, they have many celebrations such as La Virgen de Guadalupe and la

Virgen de Chinquinira. Fr. Jorge celebrates these services even if there is less attendance because he sees how important these saints are to each community. He reflects on a moment when a man in a wheelchair was clapping during the hymns at the Virgen of Chinquinira service and crying. In fall 2023, St. Johns began a successful Flea Market. Sunday School for the children is led by a couple and they are preparing for 1st Holy Communion on Easter Day. In the future Fr. Jorge hopes to create a musical band for the youth, more teachers for Sunday school, and repair the parish hall.

Cristo Rey, Trenton – The Rev. Paul Shoaf Kozak

In the year 2023, Cristo Rey went through a period of transition. The beginning of 2023 through July, the Rev. Toni Liz continued his transitional role as Interim Priest-in-Charge. The end of his tenure was highlighted by Episcopal visits from both outgoing the Rt. Rev. Stokes and the newly elected the Rt. Rev. Sally French, which included festive and sacramental liturgies. The parish called the Rev. Paul Shoaf Kozak to be their new Priest-in-Charge, and he began his role on August 1st. Working together, "Hermano Paul" and the Vestry have focused attention on making the building and property more welcoming through restoration, construction, and renovation projects. Thirteen new members were baptized on All Saints' Day. Furthermore, the congregation celebrated both its Feast Day (Nov. 26th) and La Virgen de Guadalupe (Dec. 10th) with almost 100 people in attendance. The parish invited other Hispanic parishes from the Diocese for an Advent fiesta that included *Las Posadas*. Cristo Rey is excited and energized to continue marching forward in 2024 with an expanded Vestry of 10 people that includes four new members. Creative energy will be directed towards youth and adult formation, as well as engaging the local community in social justice and evangelism efforts.

Immigration Service Center

An immigration center was created in 2021 by Fr. Jorge Antonely, Fr. Toribio Rodriguez and Enrique Rosario (lawyer). Fr Jorge knew Enrique for a long time and requested his help because he saw a need in the area. In late 2021, they received a \$15,000 Episcopal Community Services (ECS) grant. The team offers free guidance and help with filling out forms. Throughout the year they assist 3,500 people of the community. At St. John's the lawyer and team are on site every Saturday from 10am-3pm, helping undocumented people from New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania. This program is expanding to Lakewood and South River. This grant has impacted and helped our community tremendously. We thank Enrique Rosario and Rebecca Tasso for their services.

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. 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 the Hispanic Commission.

Notice of an Upcoming Event

On June 3-6th there will be a conference called Nuevo Amanecer at Kanuga, North Carolina. Many in our diocese have attended this conference and highly recommend attending. It has workshops and worship for all ages.

Conclusion

Throughout my years as the Canon for Hispanic Ministries I reflect on the growth of each parish. In 2014, we began a ministry at Christ Church, Toms River and as we developed this ministry, we had musicians Luis and Angelica and their kids present during Sunday service. I remember Luis and Angelicas' children, Sara and Luis Angel, sitting in the pew and watching their parents sing and play guitar. Recently, I was invited by Mother Lisa and Father Jose to be celebrant at a Sunday service and I saw Sara and Luis Angel, now teenagers, singing and playing instruments just like their parents do. For me this was very moving, as this shows the importance of the parents teaching them by example but also how the guidance and support of their faith is present.

Another story that fills me with joy is attending Ashes to Go at Grace, Merchantville. This parish does not have an established Hispanic ministry but serves over 700+ families at their Food Pantry every Wednesday, and many of these are Spanish speakers. We gave out ashes to about 25 of the 55 volunteers, and to about 150 guests in the parking lot and along Maple Ave, the main street in town. Grace Episcopal serves their community with love and care and that builds great relationships for a possible future ministry. Working with Spanish and English-speaking communities is rewarding. God's love unites us despite our different languages and cultures. The growth and development of a ministry is important as part of our calling and especially to serve the under-served. I request your prayers as we continue to develop and strengthen this ministry.

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