

Beyond Celebration: Heritage, Faith, and Belonging

By Rev. Ricardo Jimenez-Reyes



Hispanic/Latinx Heritage Month invites us to celebrate the richness of our cultures, languages, histories, and traditions. As a Puerto Rican, a Latino, and a Lutheran pastor, I receive this season with gratitude. Our music, stories, faith, and the wisdom of our *abuelas y abuelos* are gifts that enrich the whole church.

But celebration without honest reflection can become comfortable. And these are not comfortable times.

Across our communities, immigrant families live with fear, and Latine neighbors increasingly face hostility and exclusion. Appreciation alone is not enough. Our faith calls us toward solidarity, compassion, and justice.

I have experienced moments within the church when a prayer, reading, or hymn in Spanish has been met with discomfort or even resentment. These experiences leave me wondering: What does it mean to confess that we are part of one holy, catholic, and apostolic church if the language of our neighbors makes us uncomfortable? Where is our love and welcome for one another?

Here in the Southwestern Texas Synod, Latiné communities have long contributed to our shared life, even when their voices and leadership have not always been fully recognized or affirmed.

Somos parte de esta iglesia. We belong, not as guests, but as beloved members of Christ's body.

Perhaps this season invites us beyond celebrating diversity toward becoming a church where belonging is not merely proclaimed, but genuinely practiced.

Con gratitud, esperanza y justicia.