

Article for EDNC E-News 5/31/2022

by Jim Schaal, Executive Director, the Center at St. Matthew's

Forward with Families: EDNC Clergy Visit the Center at St. Matthew's

On May 11 and 12, the Center at St. Matthew's invited clergy from the Episcopal Diocese of Northern California to visit the Center for tours and service projects during EDNC's 2022 Clergy Conference. We were honored to welcome fourteen clergy and one clergy spouse. All three orders of clergy were represented, with Bishop Megan joining priests and deacons from across the diocese.

Reflecting on the experience in an email, the Rev. Dr. Daniel DeForest London, Rector of Christ Episcopal Church in Eureka, wrote:

I wanted to thank you again for giving me such a thorough tour of the Center at St. Matthew's last Thursday...I relished the opportunity to work with some of the volunteers at the River City Food Bank, to meet some of the instructors at Highland Community Charter School, and to visit the worship space of the Mission at St. Matthew's.

We gathered on the Center's bustling courtyard, near the spot where the founding members of St. Matthew's Episcopal Church gathered for worship in a small grocery store building that was relocated to the site in 1944. Several of the clergy noted the rich historical connection between St. Matthew's beginnings in a re-purposed grocery store and the present-day Center's vital partnership with River City Food Bank, which now serves 700 households per week out of the former Sanctuary building, built for worship in 1953 and re-purposed as a food bank in 2017.

Next we toured the Parish Hall, built in 1946 as the second temporary worship space, where the Mission at St. Matthew's now gathers once again for worship after giving the Sanctuary over to the food bank. This small but faithful congregation, carrying on the long legacy of St. Matthew's Episcopal Church, has offered worship, fellowship, and pastoral care in both Spanish and English since 2004. Once a month, the Mission congregation distributes hearty meals and care packages to unhoused people on the street and in encampments as part of the Center's partnership with Arden Arcade HART (Homeless Assistance Resource Team), a community-based nonprofit organization launched at the Center in 2019. This outreach ministry of the Mission is coordinated by the Rev. Babs Haggengos, the Mission's vocational deacon, who has also involved many local chapters of the Daughters of the King. For the Thursday tour, we were joined by the Rev. Grant Bakewell, priest associate of the Mission at St. Matthew's.

Then we toured the newly expanded and renovated classrooms, where the Center partners with Highlands Community Charter School to provide English language and literacy to 175 refugees and immigrants over four class sessions every weekday. We heard from several Highlands teachers about their passion for educating newcomers from many countries, including Afghan women who received little or no education in their home country. Here again, several clergy commented on the creative re-use of former Sunday School classrooms and portable buildings to meet the present and pressing needs of the most marginalized families in this low-income neighborhood.

Finally, we toured the food bank building, marveled at the large refrigeration unit installed where the communion table once stood, and reflected on the Eucharistic possibilities of a church building that now feeds multitudes. We heard from some of the River City Food Bank staff about the tremendous

impact of Sacramento's oldest continuously serving food bank, as it feeds the hungry in this suburban food desert.

Then our deacons, priests, and bishop alike rolled up their sleeves to pack generous helpings of big, fragrant onions in preparation for the Friday and Saturday food distributions. At that moment, there was a powerful sense of the founding vision of the Center at St. Matthew's as a community service center and outreach ministry of our entire diocese. As but one leader of this shared ministry, I felt tears well up in me—tears of joy and gratitude, which I did not pretend to blame on the onions!

We are especially grateful for the support of the Rev. Mary Claugus, rector of St. Michael's Episcopal Church in Carmichael, whose \$25,000 leadership gift has made it possible for congregations and individual donors across the diocese to double their donation to the Center at St. Matthew's during our "Forward with Families" matching gift campaign in May and June. Drawing another deep theological connection, the Rev. Dr. London continued in his email:

We'll definitely get that check sent off to you soon so that it doubles in value thanks to the generosity of the Rev. Mary Claugus... We recently installed portraits of the Twelve Apostles painted by an Episcopal priest who previously served at Christ Church Eureka in the 1960s. One of my favorite portraits is of St. Matthew, which I wrote about for the local newspaper here:

<https://deforestlondon.wordpress.com/2020/09/22/the-mischievous-smile-of-st-matthew/>

He's holding an empty purse upside down, indicating his relinquishment of greed and his embrace of generosity. I used the image in a stewardship campaign a few years ago, but I feel the image also speaks to the bold and creative ways that the Center at St. Matthew's has continued to let go of the past in order to make room for the new. It was a joy to see how the Center embodies St. Matthew's response to Christ's call to "Follow me" by faithfully lifting up hearts, feeding the hungry, and welcoming the refugee.

How To Donate

We invite you to join us in the Center at St. Matthew's "Forward with Families" giving campaign in May and June 2022. Thanks to a generous matching gift from the Rev. Mary Claugus, your donations to the Center will be doubled up to the matching gift amount of \$25,000. As of May 24, we are more than 60% of the way toward our goal of \$50,000 to "feed the hungry, welcome the refugee, care for the homeless, and lift up hearts."

To donate online, please visit the diocesan website's online giving portal at:

<https://www.norcalepiscopal.org/give/>

Click on the red "Give" button and select "The Center at St. Matthew's" from the drop-down menu. You may enter "in honor of" or "in memory of" your loved ones in the "optional memo" field.

To donate by check, please make your check payable to "Episcopal Diocese of Northern California" and write "Center at St. Matthew's" in the memo line. You may enclose a note in honor or in memory of your loved ones. Please mail your check directly to the Center at:

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